

# school district scoop.

(See it here first.)



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# headlines & happenings



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## WELCOME TO THE SPRING 2024 ISSUE OF THE WESTONKA PUBLIC SCHOOLS NEWSLETTER.

### stay in the know

Get the most up-to-date information about Westonka Schools delivered to your inbox each week by subscribing to our e-newsletter, Westonka News. Sign up online at [www.westonka.k12.mn.us/westonkanews](http://www.westonka.k12.mn.us/westonkanews) or text the word WESTONKA to 22828\*.

\*message and data rates may apply

## calendar

may 29	<b>Graduation Day</b> For the class of 2024	Westonka will celebrate members of the Class of 2024 and their families at a 6 p.m. ceremony at Mound Westonka High School.
july 19-28	<b>“Cinderella” at the PAC</b> Presented by Westonka Community Theatre	WCT presents Rodgers and Hammerstein’s “Cinderella” with weekend performances July 19, 21 and 26-28. Learn more at <a href="http://WestonkaCommunityTheatre.org">WestonkaCommunityTheatre.org</a>
august 2024	<b>Back to School 2024</b> Open houses, back-to-school registration and more	Watch for back-to-school information in the mail and on school websites in August. We’re excited to welcome students to the 2024-25 school year on Tuesday, Sept. 3.
sept. 16-20	<b>Homecoming Week</b> Show your Westonka pride at Homecoming 2024	Save the date for Westonka Homecoming Week 2024. There will be events for all ages leading up to the White Hawks football game on Friday, Sept. 20.
nov. 12	<b>Prospective Family Night</b> At the Westonka Performing Arts Center	Prospective school families are invited to learn more about Westonka Schools from Superintendent Kevin Borg. Watch for more details in the fall.

### Thank you, Westonka!

In November 2023, Westonka Public Schools residents approved both school district questions on the election ballot. The renewal of the capital projects levy provides an additional 10 years of funding for the school district’s current technology program. The \$93.4 million in bond funding approved by voters will allow the district to improve safety and security at all schools; address districtwide deferred maintenance needs; and redesign the high school to enhance the learning environment and improve functionality, safety and pride, all while maintaining the lowest school property taxes in Hennepin County. Read on to learn more about summer 2024 bond project construction.

### Record number of Westonka DECA students qualify for Internationals

Mound Westonka High School brought 166 students to the 2024 Minnesota DECA State Career Development Conference, which was held in Minneapolis in March. A school record 40 MWHS students will advance to this year’s DECA Internationals competition after placing in the Top 12 at state. Four Westonka DECA members or teams placed first in state in their respective categories. The 2024 DECA International Career Development Conference is April 26-30 in Anaheim, California.

### Tonkabots robotics team competes on world stage

The Mound Westonka Tonkabots FIRST Robotics Team took first place at the 2024 Northern Lights Regional Competition in Duluth, earning a trip to the world competition in Houston, Texas in April. With 55 teams competing in Duluth, the 41-member Tonkabots fought their way up the ranks to claim not only the regional championship but also the “Double DECCer” title over the Lake Superior region champion. Additionally, the team earned the “Best Autonomous Code” award and the most overall points in the district.

### White Hawks have strong showing in fall, winter sports

White Hawks student-athletes competed in state tournaments as teams and individuals in the fall and winter sports seasons. The girls swim and dive team placed sixth overall at state, the Hawkettes dance team placed third in state in jazz and fourth in state in high kick, and the gymnastics team was state runner-up. The White Hawks also sent individuals to state in cross country, alpine skiing, boys swimming and wrestling. Additionally, sophomore Cooper Rowe won his first state title in wrestling this winter.



# construction begins

## Summer 2024 construction

Westonka Public Schools is busy preparing for the first round of summer construction tied to the 2023 facilities bond referendum. At the April 15 Westonka School Board meeting, the board accepted bids for summer 2024 projects, which include: security improvements at Hilltop and Shirley Hills primary schools and the Early Learning Center, construction of 12 new tennis courts (with six of these courts also lined for pickleball) across Sunnyfield Road E from Mound Westonka High School, and maintenance to the district bus garage. Additionally, the district will be paving the drive south of the transportation building and reorganizing the transportation lot, as part of the current transportation footprint will be taken by the courts.

## Why these projects first?

Safety and security is a top priority of the school board and district, which is why security upgrades have been prioritized in the construction timeline. This work includes adding lockdown capacity, intrusion resistant glass, door alerts and notification lights. The relocation of the main office at Grandview Middle School to create a secured entrance and the related security improvements are being targeted for summer 2025 to allow sufficient time for design, bidding and securing of materials. High school security upgrades will be completed as part of the redesign in 2025 and 2026.

The district was able to start work on the new tennis courts this spring, as the construction does not require the lead times of equipment, design, etc., seen in other projects and work can continue into the fall. The current courts will remain operational until the new courts are finished, avoiding impacts to the boys and girls tennis seasons. When no longer needed, the current courts will be removed in order to expand the high school's north lot, providing additional parking for the school, tennis/pickleball, and other campus activities. Additionally, maintenance to the district bus garage (miscellaneous tuckpointing and electrical improvements) and parking lot fit into the summer 2024 schedule due to the limited scope of the project.



# bond project timeline

Please visit [www.westonka.k12.mn.us/bondprojects](http://www.westonka.k12.mn.us/bondprojects) for a more detailed timeline of bond projects by building.

## January 2024

The Westonka School Board approved the sale of \$43,100,000 in school building bonds (the first portion of the \$93,400,000 of bonds approved by voters in November 2023) at an interest rate of 3.57%. The current plan anticipates a second bond sale in the winter of 2026.

## Summer 2024

Summer 2024 construction projects include security improvements at Hilltop and Shirley Hills primary schools and the Westonka Early Learning Center; construction of 12 new high school tennis courts; and maintenance to the district bus garage. Tennis court construction will wrap up in spring 2025.

## Spring 2025

The high school redesign - which includes renovation to nearly the entire facility, as well as added square footage - is scheduled to start in spring/summer 2025 and continue throughout the 2025-26 school year. Construction at Grandview Middle School for security improvements, maintenance and building renovation is also expected to begin in spring 2025.

## Summer 2026

The high school redesign will continue in summer 2026, with most work expected to be complete by fall 2026. Deferred maintenance projects at Hilltop and Shirley Hills; maintenance to the high school track and athletic fields 10 and 12; construction of a new stadium; and modifications to Thaler Arena are also scheduled for spring through fall 2026.

# history repeating

## WESTONKA'S THREE-TIME STATE CHAMPIONS GARY ERDMAN '60 AND JACK NELSON '24 REFLECT ON HIGH SCHOOL WRESTLING CAREERS



## The 'three-timers' club

As he entered the bright, spacious wrestling room at the Westonka Activity Center, Gary Erdman couldn't help but remark at the difference from his wrestling days at the old Mound High School, where practices were held in the cramped space between the auditorium seats and the gym floor. Yet despite the makeshift setup of his era, Erdman managed to do something that wouldn't happen again in the Westonka community for another 63 years - earn three state titles in wrestling.

Erdman was recruited for the wrestling team at age 15 by his woodshop teacher, Harry Bockhaus, who also happened to be the wrestling coach. In his first-ever tournament, Erdman "bullied his way up to third place" but then got pinned in about 30 seconds. In that moment, Erdman vowed to "never look up at those lights again," and in the entire 1957-58 season, he didn't have a point scored against him. Erdman went on to earn consecutive state titles in 1958, 1959 and 1960.

"When I was in 11th grade, I tied for eighth as a team in the state," Erdman said. "That was my biggest achievement."

Mound Westonka High School senior Jack Nelson's road to the record books was markedly different, entering the sport when he was only in kindergarten. After making his first trip to the state tournament in eighth grade, Nelson became the first ninth grader in school history to win a state wrestling title in 2021. He took home the top prize again in 2022 and 2023 and was the state runner-up in his senior year.

While the style and precision of high school wrestling has changed over the years, some things remain the same. Erdman and Nelson reminisced about various tactics for making and cutting weight. The sport's close connection to nutrition is a key reason Nelson plans to study to be a dietician in college. "I could have been a dietician," Erdman joked. "Every holiday I had an ice cube and a Lifesaver, watching everybody else eat."

## The future is bright

In addition to Nelson, the White Hawks sent three other student-athletes to the state wrestling tournament in 2024: junior Cole Munsterteiger; sophomore Cooper Rowe; and sophomore Delaney Parker, the school's first girls state competitor. Nelson predicts that it won't be another 60 plus years before the team has another three-time state champion. "Two years. That's my prediction," Nelson said, noting that 2024 state champion Rowe has a chance at becoming the school's next "three-timer."

Looking back on his high school wrestling experience, Nelson said that he appreciated the opportunity to represent Westonka on a large stage. "Coming from a small school, you kind of perform to represent the whole community," said Nelson. "You're representing your team, yourself, your coaches, your community, your clubs." Next year, Nelson will have the chance to represent his hometown as an NCAA Division I wrestler at the University of Minnesota.

"Good luck in your ventures, kiddo," Erdman told Nelson. "Just remember to keep moving."