

WILLOUGHBY - EASTLAKE CITY SCHOOLS COMMUNITY UPDATE

Message from the Superintendent

It is hard to believe we are already in the second quarter of the school year. On behalf of the Board of Education, our administrative team, and all Willoughby-Eastlake staff, thank you for your continued partnership and support. As a district, we remain deeply committed to transparency, accountability, and keeping our families and residents informed with timely and relevant updates.

We have a great deal to be proud of as we see the progress of our students on a daily basis and watch them grow and achieve over the course of the year. Our Shared Vision continues to guide our work, and our Portrait of a Graduate and commitment to future readiness remains the focus of our work each day. From preschool through graduation, we are dedicated to creating a rigorous and engaging learning experience for every student. Our focus remains on building a strong academic foundation while expanding personalized and innovative learning opportunities that prepare students for their future.

This year, we have also begun the process of transitioning to become our own Career Comprehensive. This exciting step will expand opportunities for students and strengthen partnerships with local businesses throughout the western end of Lake County. It is truly an exciting time to be a student in Willoughby-Eastlake Schools.

I am sharing an update regarding proposed legislation that could significantly impact school funding in Ohio. The primary source of revenue for public schools remains the property tax. Over the past two years, the district has worked diligently to stretch every dollar, repurpose funds, and prioritize classroom instruction as part of our ongoing commitment to excellence and continuous improvement. While we support reimagining how schools are funded, we believe this must not come at the expense of the education our students receive. Unfortunately, several of the proposed legislative "fixes" would provide only minimal relief to taxpayers while shifting more of the financial burden back onto homeowners and jeopardizing essential school operations and programs.

To proactively address these challenges, we formed a School Funding Work Group to study and propose meaningful, community-centered solutions. Our goal is clear: to deliver a world-class education, serve as a strong community partner, and provide the best possible value for every tax dollar entrusted to us. It is time to think differently, secure our future, and together, continue to lead the way.

Patrick Ward

Patrick Ward, PhD. | Superintendent
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Royalview Elementary Renovations

Royalview Elementary School is scheduled to receive significant renovations this school year, resulting in improved facilities, energy efficiency, and a more comfortable learning environment. These projects focus on electrical, lighting, and cooling systems. Royalview serves 670 students in grades K-5.

The school will undergo a complete LED lighting upgrade across all classrooms, hallways, and offices. The school's core infrastructure is also being addressed with electrical upgrades. To provide a more comfortable environment during warmer months, Royalview is getting air conditioning. This project will install a heat pump style system, which includes indoor and rooftop units to provide cooling throughout the building.

After Royalview is completed, which will also include new flooring, new ceilings, paint and furniture, the school board will have another conversation with the public about Willowick Middle School improvements.



“The goal is to create a facility that looks radically different than it does today. We are excited to make a visible investment in a community that is very supportive of the school district, and we appreciate the members of the school board supporting this effort to improve our facilities for our staff and students.”

Dr. Patrick Ward
Superintendent

Royalview was selected as the first school for renovation because during the 2019 renovations, it was the campus that saw the fewest upgrades due to other priorities in the district, and it is our largest elementary school. Dr. Ward shared, “The community will be really pleased with the enhancements we have planned for the campus. Our staff and students deserve to have facilities that provide a pleasant and comfortable environment for teaching and learning.”

Construction at Royalview Elementary School in Willowick will begin this fall with all work being completed in time for the opening of school in August 2026.

Message from the Treasurer/CFO

The district continues to prioritize fiscal responsibility in all operations. We are pleased to share that the district has received recognition for these efforts through two significant awards for the 2024 fiscal year.

- The district was honored with the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) Award for excellence in financial reporting.
- In addition, the district received the Auditor of State Award with Distinction, reflecting the highest standards of financial accountability and transparency.

We remain attentive to developments at the Statehouse, as legislative changes can have direct impacts on school funding and operations. Our goal is to stay proactive and responsive to ensure stability for our students, staff, and community.

The district is committed to sound financial management practices, and we will continue to provide regular updates as we navigate these important responsibilities together.

Nick Ciarniello

Nick Ciarniello | Treasurer/Chief Financial Officer



Arts, Athletics and Extracurriculars in Action

Shared Vision Priority #2: The W-E Experience

Mike Pennington, Assistant Superintendent, Andrea Tredent, Director of Technology

Gina Kevern, Director of Communications and Community Engagement

Every day in Willoughby-Eastlake, our students are discovering who they are and what they love to do. Whether it's taking the stage, competing on the field, creating in the art room, or leading a club, these experiences shape confident, connected, and compassionate young people. The W-E Experience is where learning meets passion, a place that nurtures the mind, body, and heart. By encouraging students to explore their interests, form meaningful friendships, and strive for excellence beyond the classroom, we are helping them prepare for whatever path they choose. Enjoy these spotlights celebrating the visual and performing arts and two outstanding female sports teams.

Eastlake North High School Girls' Volleyball Team

High school sports offer so much more than competition. They give students a chance to grow, connect, and thrive. For the Eastlake North Girls' Volleyball team, the court is a place where teamwork, leadership, and time management come alive. Student athletes gain confidence, form lasting friendships, and feel a deeper connection to their school community. Athletics also support physical wellness and provide healthy outlets for stress, helping students flourish both academically and personally.

The growing excitement around girls' volleyball and female athletics reflects the legacy of talented athletes who have come through our district and the rising stars continuing that tradition. With a dedicated coaching staff and enthusiastic student athletes, the energy in our gyms has never been higher. Each serve, spike, and cheer brings our community together, creating an atmosphere full of pride, passion, and possibility.

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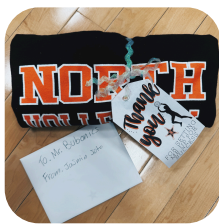
Being a student athlete has helped me learn to manage my time and how to handle pressure while also challenging me. Balancing school and sports isn't always easy and can add stress, but it's pushed me to stay organized and work through it.

Lacey Staska, Junior
Junior Setter, Right Side Hitter

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From Court to Community: Growing Leaders Through Volleyball



Coach Mackenzie Dolejs shares, “As a former volleyball player, coaching is my way of giving back to a sport that shaped me. Volleyball taught me lessons I carry into the workforce today, discipline, teamwork, and a strong work ethic, and I’m passionate about passing those skills on to the next generation of athletes.”

The growing excitement around girls' volleyball, and female sports in general, will inspire more young athletes to join. With dedicated coaching staff and enthusiastic players, these programs have gained energy and momentum, bringing a renewed sense of excitement to both playing and cheering. From the gyms to the fields, there's a fresh, vibrant spirit that celebrates skill, teamwork, and the joy of the game.

The team honors teachers during Teacher Appreciation Night and also supports charitable events with other teams in the league.

Arts, Athletics and Extracurriculars in Action

Shared Vision Priority #2: The W-E Experience

South High Leads the Way with Girls' Flag Football



Beginning with the 2026 season, the Girls' Flag Football state championship tournament will be sanctioned by the Ohio High School Athletic Association (OHSAA). This opens the door for it to possibly become a varsity sport in 2027. This was exciting news for **Coach Matt McCue** who shared, "Flag football has opened the door for more girls to participate in high school athletics. It's been incredibly rewarding to watch these athletes take advantage of the opportunities the sport offers. This past year, we celebrated our first player to earn both an academic and athletic scholarship to a Division 1 college for flag football." McCue stated that he never dreamed that possibility would be a reality after only two years of developing a team.

"I will never forget that cold and rainy night at Mentor stadium in 2023 where we won our first Northeast Ohio Girls High School Flag Championship. A lot of grit and determination was shown on the field that night and it was a very special memory to celebrate that win with Willoughby South High School."



Coach Matt McCue



Growing the Game: Girls' Flag Football and the Cleveland Browns



Olivia Pennington, shown above with Browns Coach Kevin Stefanski, was named last year as the Build the Bridge state girls' flag football player of the year. Pennington is very humble about her success, saying that she stays relaxed and focuses on getting the ball from the quarterback and running it down the field. Currently a junior at Willoughby South, she is a multi-sport athlete, who is also succeeding in soccer and track, and previously played basketball. The flag team recently went 5-0 to win the first annual Ignite Tournament.

From the very beginning, the **Cleveland Browns** have been champions of girls' flag football, supporting our community with uniforms, equipment, referees, coaches, and clinics at the Browns' training facility. One of the season's most memorable moments is the New Era Summit, where local teams visit the stadium for tours and presentations that spotlight women thriving in all areas of professional sports. At the heart of this growth is Hannah Lee, Browns Youth Football Manager, who has nurtured the program from just six teams to nearly 100 in five short years, creating opportunities for countless young athletes to play, compete, and dream big.



Celebrating Creativity: Visual and Performing Arts

From the stage to the studio, our teachers and students bring creativity and passion to life every day. It is important to celebrate the impact of arts on students, and showcase the talent, dedication, and imagination that make our schools shine.

Art - A Place to Explore and Take Risks

Art education empowers students to think creatively, solve problems, and express themselves in meaningful ways, skills that are essential in today's ever-changing world. Through the visual and performing arts, students learn to see connections, embrace diverse perspectives, and bring imagination to life, both inside and outside the classroom. "The art room combines play and hard work," says **Lisa Focareto, School of Innovation**. "It gives students a safe space to think, experiment, and practice taking risks." Students develop original ideas and see projects through from start to finish, building pride and confidence in their creations. **Heidi Kirschnick, Eastlake North High School**, agrees. Art is a way to express themselves that is so different from traditional classes. "Art classes don't teach just technique. Art is about figuring things out. Mistakes are opportunities to try again. This process builds confidence and validates students' unique voices."



Skills for Life - More Than Just Music and Art

Willoughby South's Kevin Mateosky believes, "Visual arts help students develop critical thinking, self-expression and community awareness skills that prepare them for careers and life beyond school."

Music education goes beyond singing or playing instruments. **Devra Levine, Eastlake North choir teacher**, notes that "music helps students become more creative, collaborative and resilient. Students find community and confidence in choir through practices and performances." In addition to skill development, the beauty of watching students create art in any form lies in seeing students having fun, beaming with pride and having an impact on others who see the value in their performance or art pieces.

Students who aspire to participate in the arts programs have a lot of options. From exploring the foundations of art education in the elementary STEAM program, to dedicated electives in middle school and high school, students can pursue general studies as well as focus on specific areas that pique their interest. Courses vary depending upon interest, enrollment and teacher availability at each school each year. Take a look at the various options our students had this year as visual and performing art electives.

Middle Schools: Exploratory Music, Choir, Instrumental Music, Art

North High School: Symphonic Band, Wind Symphony, Concert Choir, Mixed Chorus - Performing, Art I-IV, Ceramics I-II, Community Service Through Art I-II

South High School: Symphonic Band, Wind Symphony, Concert Choir, Mixed Chorus - Performing, Art I-IV, Ceramics I-II, Graphic Design I-II



Music - Building Confidence, Collaboration and Joy

"Music classes are the favorite part of the day for many students. Creating new things while getting to sing, dance and play instruments brings so much joy to their lives and activates different parts of their brain simultaneously," says **Longfellow Elementary's Michael Clements**. Whether students are preparing for a concert or a Drama Club performance, they are experiencing what it means to create, tapping into interests and skills that might be new to them. Experiencing the joy of creating something that was once in their imagination, but is now available for others to see, hear and experience, is one of the greatest gifts our teachers get to witness with the students.



Willoughby-Eastlake City Schools
35353 Curtis Blvd
Eastlake, OH 44095

School Board Members

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Willoughby-Eastlake Schools



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Senior Citizens' Night Out December 2nd - Save the Date!

We invite our senior citizens, ages 65 and up, to join us for Senior Citizens' Night Out on Tuesday, December 2, 2025. This has become a cherished and popular annual tradition celebrating community, connection, and holiday cheer! This free event includes a delicious dinner and festive performances by our talented elementary, middle, and high school students. It's a wonderful opportunity to share a meal with friends, enjoy the music of the season, and experience the joy and talent of our youth.

WHEN: Tuesday, December 2, 2025 from 4 - 6 p.m.

WHERE: Willoughby South High School
4900 Shankland Road, Willoughby, OH 44094

RSVP by November 24, 2025
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