

WILLOUGHBY - EASTLAKE CITY SCHOOLS COMMUNITY UPDATE

Message from the Superintendent

The second semester of the school year is well underway. It is an important moment to reflect on our progress and look ahead with optimism and purpose. Across the district, students and staff continue to demonstrate commitment, resilience, and excellence. Our momentum is strong, and our direction is clear.

We continue to invest in ensuring every student has a meaningful path to success. This work is grounded in the development of a student-centered learning framework that prioritizes engagement, relevance, and future readiness. Our workforce development and career programming in grades 7–12 continues to expand. Students seek opportunities to connect learning to life beyond the classroom.

Literacy remains the foundation of all learning. We are seeing continued improvement across grade levels. Strengthening reading, writing, and communication skills remains a core priority.

We also remain focused on providing safe, supportive learning environments on every campus. Renovations at the Royalview campus are now underway. This work reflects our capital plan in action and our commitment to long-term stewardship of district facilities.

As we look to the future, we remain committed to exploring ways to secure and stabilize school funding for the decade ahead. Sound financial planning is essential to sustaining high-quality programming and services for students and families.

All of this work is guided by our Shared Vision for Future Readiness and our Portrait of a Graduate. These commitments anchor our decisions and define what success looks like for every learner. Because of this focus and alignment, Willoughby-Eastlake City Schools is leading the way, not only in our region, but across the state and the nation. We are helping shape what the future of schooling should be.

As we continue this work, we remain proud of the traditions, relationships, and sense of community that define Willoughby-Eastlake. These experiences will stay with our students long after graduation. This work matters. We are grateful for the continued trust and support of our community. Together, we are building a future-ready school system for every student.

We are Willoughby-Eastlake and we are on the move!

Patrick Ward

Patrick Ward, Ph.D. | Superintendent
[#MyChoiceWilloughbyEastlake](#)



Message from the Treasurer/CFO

The District continues to carefully manage its finances while planning for changes in how school funding works in Ohio. Recent property tax reform legislation passed by the Ohio General Assembly, including House Bills 186, 335, 129, and 309, is gradually changing how much revenue school districts receive from property taxes. These laws are designed to slow the growth of property tax collections when property values rise, creating more predictability for taxpayers. As a result, school districts across the state, including ours, should expect to receive less revenue over time than what had previously been forecasted under older funding rules.

Because property tax reform is still evolving and implementation details continue to be refined, the District closely monitors updates and adjusts its long-term financial planning accordingly. This makes responsible, appropriate spending more important than ever. The Board of Education and administration regularly review budget forecasts and compare projected revenues to actual results to ensure resources are aligned with educational priorities, operational needs, and long-term stability. While these funding changes present challenges, the District remains committed to thoughtful planning, transparency, and maintaining strong financial stewardship on behalf of our community.

Nick Ciarniello

Nick Ciarniello | Treasurer/Chief Financial Officer



Meet Our School Board



Mrs. Stacy Menser
President



Ms. Jaime Shatsman
Vice President



Mrs. Gabrielle Miller
Member



Mrs. Rhonda Osagie-Erese
Member



Mrs. Denise Verdi
Member

School Board Recognition Month in January was an opportunity to extend our deepest gratitude to the dedicated community members who serve on our Board of Education. These individuals serve as fierce advocates for every child.

By working alongside the superintendent and the treasurer, championing the development and implementation of our Shared Vision, our Board members lead the way in creating a robust, student-centered learning environment. Their leadership fosters a culture of innovation, opening doors for both staff and students to explore new educational frontiers. We appreciate their selfless commitment to making community engagement a priority, ensuring that our schools remain a point of pride and a hub of opportunity for all.



Aligned for Impact: Student Guest Columnist

Drew Dingeldein, Junior
Eastlake North High School



School can, frankly, be a lot to handle, regardless of the level. Every advancement in grade comes with new things. New topics to learn, new people to deal with, and new environments. While change can be scary, as most people will tell you, change is what makes you grow. If nothing ever changed, humanity as a whole would be stuck hunting mammoths using pointy sticks.

Change is what has allowed marvelous things such as the internet, potato chips, and taxes to exist. Granted, "marvelous" might be generous for the latter of those three, but I digress. The biggest example of change in someone's life, undeniably, comes with high school.



Coming to high school was almost a breath of fresh air, at least for myself. It meant finally moving on from being a kid, and taking another step toward maturity. It also aligned with, seemingly, the end of people worrying about COVID. Amidst this year of change, an opportunity appeared. Practically unintelligible over the talking in my homeroom, the school announcements talked about applications for a Principal's Advisory Committee. A group of North students, representing a good portion of the student body, would have the job of providing administration with insight on the people that their policies and events actually affect. This was the beginning of a profound ability to guide the change happening to everyone in a positive way.

While the Committee was a success, it was limited. There isn't much that a single school can do. However, shortly after it was formed, yet another path opened. Dr. Ward, the new superintendent, was creating something similar, just on a larger scale. Instead of guiding school policy, we were guiding district policy. The positive impact of the Superintendent Student Advisory Council was evident within that first year as we worked to raise money to pay for a large food donation to 68 Hours of Hunger, a non-profit food service that gives free food out to struggling families within the district and county. Other positive things the committee helped bring into being included the development of self-paced classes, late start Wednesdays, and multiple discussions on the future of the district with the recent advances in technology.

As I have, hopefully, made clear, change can be a great thing. Change has allowed our school district to be at the forefront of modernizing how school functions. Furthermore, anyone can help cause this positive change! Being active in your community, volunteering at local events and charities, even something as simple as voting can lead to great things. Equally, just one tiny event not happening could cause something major to go completely differently. Before living in the school district, my family called Mentor home. Had we not moved, I never would have had the chance to even fathom making as large of an impact as I have, even tangentially. Without North, and the broader Willoughby-Eastlake City Schools District, who knows what life would be like?

Taking all I have experienced into account, I cannot encourage anyone enough to go and do things. Admittedly, most of you reading this are parents, so that changes how you can influence things. In any case, I encourage you to participate as much as possible. Join the PTA/PTSO, and talk to your kids about getting involved in student leadership. If you, or they, need motivation, things like this look great on college applications. They also really make school more enjoyable. It acts as a break in the rhythm that is the usual school day, and a great opportunity to both speak your mind and actually think about things on a broader scale. I cannot commend enough the administrators, district-wide, that have given students the opportunity to lead change for the better. Our generation, the ones in school right now, are the future of leadership everywhere. Giving us the ability to learn how to lead now can only benefit everyone. The chance to contribute positively has been an amazing experience and is one for which I will be eternally grateful.

2026-2027 Kindergarten Registration Open

Enrollment is open for all Willoughby-Eastlake residents. Register by June 1st for a free gift!



Students who are **5 years old** on or before **August 24, 2026** are eligible for kindergarten.

Online kindergarten registration will open beginning **February 15, 2026**.



Willoughby-Eastlake
CITY SCHOOLS



FREE GIFT!
Register by June 1st

WILLOUGHBY-EASTLAKE CITY SCHOOLS
2026-2027 Kindergarten Registration

Students must be **5 years old** on or before **August 24, 2026**.

Registration is Open!
Visit the district website www.weschools.org
Go to link: **ENROLLMENT**

NEED HELP? CALL AND MAKE AN APPOINTMENT AT YOUR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AFTER JUNE 1ST, CONTACT CENTRAL REGISTRATION AT **440-975-3784**

Aligned for Impact: Creativity, Innovation and Engagement

Rebel Fishing Club: Lures, Lines and Life Skills

At South High School, the most popular "fishing hole" isn't a lake or a stream, it's a classroom. While you won't find any water on the floors, you will find a dedicated group of students mastering the art of the cast and the science of the strike.

The **Rebel Fishing Club** is the brainchild of **Mr. George Burke**, a teacher who decided to merge his professional calling with his personal passion. What began as a "passion project" has evolved into a unique sanctuary for students looking for something beyond the traditional elective or sports team.



From Blueprint to Bait

The club didn't appear overnight. Mr. Burke spent years in the "development stage," researching programs across the country and cold-calling industry giants. His mission was simple: ensure that any student, regardless of their financial background, could walk into the club and be fully equipped to fish.

The industry responded with a resounding "yes." After contacting more than 70 companies, the club secured roughly \$2,000 in donated gear, ensuring that "lack of equipment" would never be a barrier to entry.

The Catch (Without the Water)

Every fishing story has a twist, and the Rebel Fishing Club is no different. Since there isn't an accessible fishing lake on campus, the group had to get creative. To many, a fishing club without a lake might seem like a ship without an ocean, but Mr. Burke saw it as an opportunity to dive deeper into the craft.

Inside the classroom, the 15-member crew, mostly underclassmen this year, engages in a high-tech, hands-on curriculum:

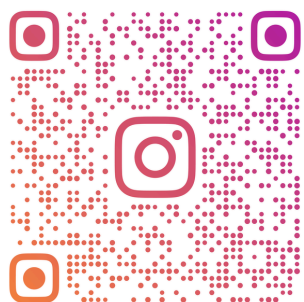
- Custom Rod Building: Thanks to several grants, students are currently building their own custom fishing rods.
- Lure Manufacturing: Members learn the chemistry and craft of pouring their own soft-plastic baits.
- The STEM of the Stream: Through the Trout in the Classroom program, students study ecology and biology firsthand.
- Skill Mastery: From intricate knot-tying to precision casting drills, students learn the "life skills" of patience and persistence.

More Than Just a Hobby

For Mr. Burke, the club serves the same purpose as the Creative Writing elective he launched years ago: filling a void. It's about providing a "place of stability" for students who might be struggling elsewhere. "I created the fishing club to give students an alternative way to express themselves," Burke says. He notes that for some members, especially those facing personal or financial hardships, the club provides the "confidence to try something new" in a safe, supportive environment.

The Rebel Fishing Club proves that you don't need a boat or a pier to find your footing. Sometimes, all you need is a little bit of tackle, a lot of community, and a teacher willing to show you the ropes, or in this case, the lines.

How to Follow the Journey



WS_INTRAMURALFISHING

Want to see the Rebels in action? Scan the QR code to visit their official Instagram page and see photos of the custom rods, lures, and student highlights from the past year.



The Trout in the Classroom Program allows students to raise trout from eggs to fingerlings, which are eventually released in the spring into one of the local tributaries.

System-wide Operations for Safety and Security

Shared Vision Priority #3: Fiscal Responsibility and Operations



Why AEDs Matter

When it comes to campus safety, every second counts. Upgrading to the latest Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) ensures that our schools are equipped with the most reliable, user-friendly technology available for both our smallest students and our adult staff.

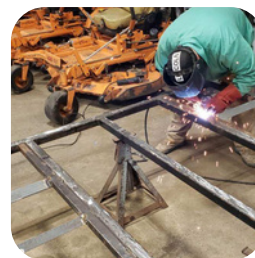
Modern AEDs are designed to be more intuitive, providing clear, real-time voice instructions that guide a rescuer through the process. Having devices specifically calibrated for both adult and pediatric use means our response can be precisely tailored to the patient's needs, significantly increasing the chances of a positive outcome during a cardiac emergency.

New equipment is only effective when paired with a prepared team. That is why our district remains committed to a culture of readiness:

- Annual Certification: All staff members complete mandatory AED training every year through Public School Works.
- Rapid Response: This training ensures that from the classroom to the gymnasium, there is always a trained professional ready to act.
- Fiscal Stewardship: By investing in these updated units now, we are prioritizing long-term student safety and ensuring our campuses meet the highest standards of emergency preparedness.

Maintenance and Operations

Behind the scenes of every successful school day is a dedicated maintenance and operations team working tirelessly to keep our campuses safe, clean, and fully operational. Whether they are clearing snow-covered walkways and parking lots in the pre-dawn hours, managing complex HVAC systems, repairing water lines or cleaning up up downed trees, or responding to emergency repairs in the middle of the night, their commitment is apparent around the clock.



A.L.I.C.E. Safety Protocols

The A.L.I.C.E. philosophy, Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, and Evacuate, represents a proactive, research-based approach to school safety. Within the Willoughby-Eastlake School District, the A.L.I.C.E. framework is implemented through structured, age-appropriate drills and ongoing staff training.

Each building conducts regular safety exercises that simulate realistic scenarios while prioritizing emotional safety and learning. Staff are trained to lead calmly and communicate effectively, while students are guided to think critically about their environment, identifying exits, securing spaces, and following the directions of trained adults. The district partners closely with local law enforcement to evaluate each drill, review response times, and refine procedures. This commitment ensures that every W-E student and staff member not only understands the A.L.I.C.E. principles but also feels confident applying them, strengthening a districtwide culture of vigilance, preparedness, and collective responsibility for safety and security.

"As principal, nothing matters more to me than the safety and well-being of our students and staff. Our safety drills and discussions are designed to ensure that every person in our building knows what to do in an emergency so that we can protect one another with confidence in school and in the real world."

Scott Stasa, Principal
Willowick Middle School

When it comes to the safety of our students and staff, we're dedicated to giving them the best tools possible, and that's exactly what our A.L.I.C.E. training and drills are designed to do. We practice so that every person in our building feels confident and prepared. Their well-being is the absolute top priority for our school community.

Jim Greene, Principal
Willoughby Middle School

The best way to ensure our buildings remain safe is a well-trained staff and student body. Our presentations for both students and staff, combined with future situational drills, will ensure everyone in our building is prepared to act if needed. I'm thankful for local law enforcement, parents and guardians for their support.

Victor Puskas, Principal
Eastlake North High School

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

School Board Members

Stacy Menser, President

Jaime Shatsman, Vice President

Gabrielle Miller, Member

Rhonda Osagie-Erese, Member

Denise Verdi, Member

Follow the district on social media!



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Willoughby-Eastlake Schools



@WESchools

School Bus Safety Grant

Willoughby-Eastlake City Schools was recently awarded a \$151,476 Department of Education and Workforce Ohio School Bus Safety Grant.

These grant funds will provide safety upgrades to existing buses. Director of Operations Steve Johnson said, "These funds will support the purchase of enhanced broadband mobile radio equipment, backup cameras and seat-back safety restraints on a quarter of our district-owned fleet of 81 total school buses." This grant award is aligned with our District's Shared Vision for Fiscal Responsibility and Operations.

Ohio Governor Mike DeWine and the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce announced the awards to 371 districts and county boards of developmental disabilities as an "important step toward continuous improvement in student transportation safety."

