

WILLOUGHBY - EASTLAKE CITY SCHOOLS COMMUNITY UPDATE

Message from the Superintendent

The arrival of spring often feels almost magical. One day, trees are bare, and the next, they are bursting with green leaves and blossoms. Our fields and courts come alive with the sounds of families and friends who gather to support their favorite teams. We see the return of students riding bicycles to school, thankful to be outside in warmer weather and sunshine. And somehow, in what feels like the blink of an eye, we find ourselves nearing the end of another school year.

It's hard to believe that in just two short months, we will close the chapter on this year and soon after welcome everyone back again in August. Time has a way of moving faster than we expect, but it also serves as an important reminder: these moments of childhood are precious, and they deserve to be cherished. It is truly an honor for our staff to walk alongside our students and their families, supporting their journey and growth into young adults.

As we enter April and May, I encourage all of us to pause and enjoy this special time of year. These final months are filled with traditions and celebrations that mark meaningful milestones for students of all ages. Our youngest learners will celebrate their first "graduation," eagerly looking ahead to becoming "big kids." Fifth graders are preparing for middle school with a mix of excitement and anticipation, while our high school students continue making important strides toward their future plans.

From graduation ceremonies and awards programs to field days, concerts, and plays, these experiences create lasting memories for students and families alike.

We are also grateful for the incredible support of our parent volunteers and community partners. Their dedication helps make the W-E experience so special for every student. The strength and support of our community is a cornerstone of the exceptional opportunities we provide.

At every grade level, our commitment remains the same: to provide each child with a high-quality education and a supportive environment where they can learn, grow, and thrive. It is a responsibility we value deeply and a partnership we are proud to share with our families. Soak up these spring moments and know that we appreciate you making Willoughby-Eastlake your choice for a public education.

Patrick Ward

Patrick Ward, Ph.D. | Superintendent
#MyChoiceWilloughbyEastlake



Willowick Show Choir



Message from the Treasurer/CFO

The District continues to carefully manage its finances while planning for changes in how school funding works in Ohio. On March 20, 2026, the recent property tax reform legislation passed by the Ohio General Assembly, including House Bills 186, 335, 129, and 309, has gone into effect. 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 been forecasted under the previous funding structure.

The Lake County Commissioners are planning to decide whether or not to continue with the "piggyback" provision for the owner-occupied and homestead exemption by the end of June 2026. These were approved last year by the Commissioners, which resulted in an estimated loss of \$2.8 million per year to the Willoughby-Eastlake City Schools District.

The Board of Education and the administrative team are evaluating the district's options as a result of the legislative changes that have taken place. No decisions had been made by the end of March.

Nick Ciarniello

Nick Ciarniello | Treasurer/Chief Financial Officer



Royalview Renovations Update

Royalview Elementary is showing signs of a significant facelift with work scheduled to be completed through the summer of 2027. The work has been completed in the evenings and on the weekends to avoid disruptions to the classrooms. Below you can see an example of the difference after the efficient LED lighting installation.

Phase 1 (Through August 2026)

- Upgraded lighting throughout the building (completed)
- Electrical work
- HVAC upgrades and air conditioning installation
- Air conditioning will be fully operational for the start of the 2026–2027 school year

Phase 2 (Through August 2027)

- Asbestos abatement completion
- Renovation of classroom spaces
- Walls, flooring, cabinetry, and furniture upgrades
- Completion of the remaining structural and aesthetic improvements



BEFORE



AFTER

Aligned for Impact

The Power of the Team: Redefining the Middle School Experience

Middle school is a time of rapid change, but in our district, students don't have to navigate it alone. By moving from a traditional junior high school model to a middle school teaming model, the district created a more collaborative and supportive structure for education in grades six through eight. The power of teams is not only the teachers' commitment to working together, but more importantly their commitment to advocate collectively for students and make sure students succeed, and feel seen and heard.



Small Teams, Big Connections



Teaming allows teachers to manage smaller rosters, leading to more meaningful connections. One veteran teacher shared, "It allows us to more easily connect with and establish positive rapport with students, as we have a higher level of daily contact and interaction within the instructional setting."

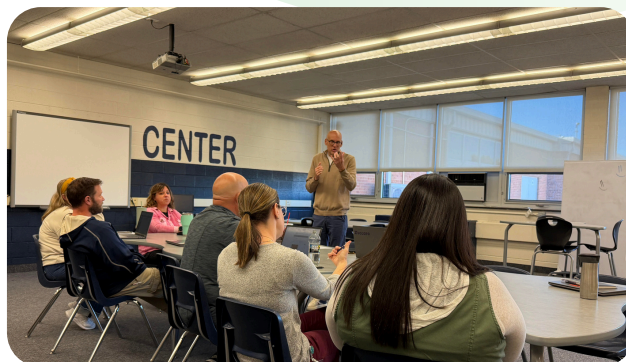
Students are feeling the difference, too. One eighth grader noted, "My teachers know my name. They come up to me and say hi, and it actually makes my day." This sense of being seen is the foundation of a safe, productive learning environment.

The teams work together to create consistent expectations across classrooms and balance academic workloads for students. Teachers share strategies, resources, and ideas, which improves instructional delivery and allows them to learn from each other's strengths.

Mrs. Nikki Stotler, Middle School Coordinator, says, "One of the most powerful outcomes has been the development of stronger relationships between staff and students, and more collaboration between staff. The teaming model helps students feel known and supported by the adults in their school." Another positive result of teaming is the opportunity students have to build long-lasting friendships on their teams.

Collective Problem Solving and Consistency

When a student struggles, they have a lot of people who are familiar with their needs and supporting them. Shared behavior tracking and unified grading helps students know exactly what is expected of them in every classroom, reducing anxiety and increasing accountability. The same is true for students who excel; the teachers can talk about how to challenge their thinking and personalize their experiences. Teams use their daily Professional Learning Community (PLC) time to plan together, and schedule one-on-one talks with students to determine what they need to be successful. "In the past, I rarely had the opportunity to meet with my colleagues to discuss students or routines," one teacher reflected. "Now, we support each other and maintain consistency across the grade level."



Aligned for Impact

The Power of the Team: Redefining the Middle School Experience

A Growing Community

While the transition has been relatively easy and has resulted in improved middle school experiences for everyone, it is a journey of continuous improvement. Staff members are getting feedback from each other and from students to identify ways to ensure the entire school remains a cohesive community and students flourish.

Guided by the expertise of Jack C. Berckemeyer, author of *Successful Middle School Teaming*, who has provided coaching and professional development support, teaming is about the growth, development, and well-being of students. By putting our students at the center of every decision, we are building a middle school environment where everyone belongs.

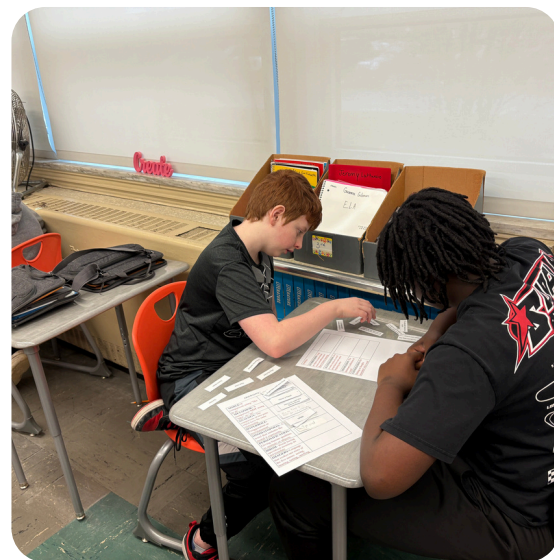
Going From “Icky” to “Awesome”



When you think of algae, you probably think of "green stuff" growing in the water. Did you know that algae has the potential to go from being "icky" to "awesome"?

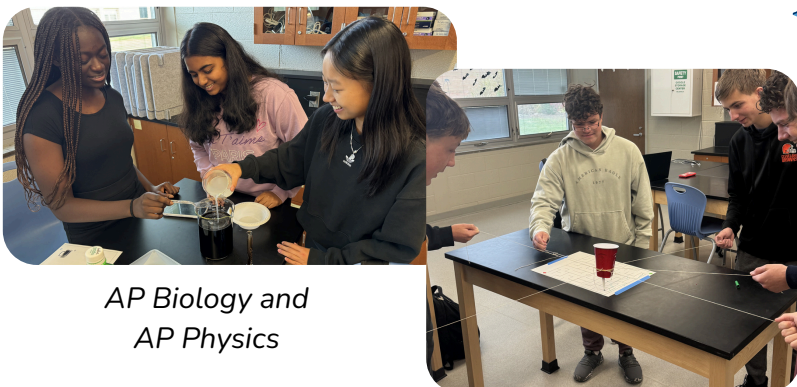
Students in sixth grade science class at **Willoughby Middle** learned how to cultivate algae, monitor growth, and analyze and interpret data. Making connections about algae production and its positive effect on the global environment was eye-opening.

Thanks to the innovative teaching style of **Mrs. Victoria Dodich**, who seeks out supplementary resources to add to her lessons, students got firsthand experience by using "The Algae Academy" curriculum for exploration. Sponsored by the U.S Department of Energy Bioenergy Technologies Office, hands-on learning and authentic science experiences are sparking curiosity and nurturing extraordinary growth.



Willoughby South AP Honors

Willoughby South High School earned a spot on the **2025 Advanced Placement (AP) School Honor Roll**. South was recognized at the Bronze level this year. This is a huge credit to the teachers and students who have committed to academic excellence to make our AP program a success and set students up for the future.



AP Biology and
AP Physics

AP Honor Roll Criteria



College Culture: 40% or more of the graduating cohort took at least one AP Exam during high school.



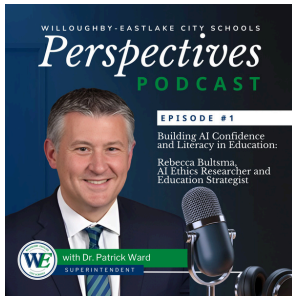
College Credit: 25% or more of the graduating cohort scored a 3 or higher on at least one AP Exam during high school.



College Optimization: 2% or more of the graduating cohort took 5 or more AP Exams during high school.

At least one of those exams was taken in 9th or 10th grade so that students are spreading their AP experience across their years in high school rather than feeling disproportionate pressure in any single year.

Around the District



Perspectives Podcast with Dr. Ward

We just launched a brand new communications tool - our **Perspectives with Dr. Ward** podcast! Each month, we sit down for honest conversations about education, where we are, where we are going, and how we support every student's learning journey as well as the educators leading the way.

Each episode brings a new voice and a new perspective on student-centered learning, innovation, opportunity, and what it truly means to prepare students for life beyond the classroom.

Our first episode featured **Rebecca Bultsma**, an **AI Researcher and Education Strategist**. She spent an entire day with the staff on our February Professional Development Day. She delivered two keynote addresses, met with our Innovation Think Tank group of teachers and administrators who model creative teaching and learning strategies, and provided a parent session to have conversations about how to navigate the new AI landscape. We are committed to ensuring that we help our staff and students use technology responsibly, while also maintaining our promise to the community, to foster the relationships and maintain that human connection in education.

Listen on [Apple](#), [Spotify](#), and [YouTube](#)

Social Media Awareness for Parents: Do You Know What Your Child Is Doing Online?

Join us for an important community event for parents and caregivers.

The **Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)**, along with **Tim and Tamia Woods** of the **Do It For James Foundation**, will present and lead a conversation about the dangers of social media and tips to ensure your child's safety. Topics include:

Sextortion: What is it? What are the warning signs this is occurring? How can you proactively ensure this is not happening to your child?

Local Stories: FBI Agents will share local stories in an effort to help create awareness and ensure your child's safety.

Online Apps: Which apps are safe and which ones should kids avoid? What are some "red flags" that would indicate an unsafe online app?

Resources and Handouts: Local FBI agents will share resources and handouts to help spread awareness around all of these topics for you and your child.

The Story of James Woods: A Parent's Journey from Heartbreak to Purpose

James Woods was a 17-year-old senior who took his own life following online exploitation. His parents, Tim and Tamia Woods, have taken their grief and channeled their time and compassion to helping other families. As Co-Founders of the Do It For James Foundation, they are fighting tirelessly and advocating for stronger laws, meaningful protection and real accountability for responsible social media.

During their presentation, they will share:

- Tools needed to help trustworthy adults and youth fight against sextortion.
- How to file a report, how to properly warn others of the dangers and what to do if they are ever in a situation where they are thinking about committing suicide.
- The story of James Timothy Woods will be shared, followed by questions and discussion.



Register to Attend

WHEN: Monday, April 27, 2026
5:30 - 8:00 p.m.

WHAT: Community Booths
Dinner Appetizers, and
Presentations

PLACE: Eastlake North High School
34041 Stevens Boulevard
Eastlake North High School

**REGISTRATION
QR CODE:**

Questions:

pr@weschools.org
440-602-5099



Around the District

Class of 2026 High School Graduations

Ceremonies will be held at the Connor Palace, Playhouse Square, Cleveland.

Willoughby South High School, Tuesday, May 26, 2026, 6:30 p.m.

Eastlake North High School, Thursday, May 28, 2026, 6:30 p.m.

Questions? Contact the Guidance Office.



FREE Community Produce Market

The district hosts a free produce market each month. Any community member can drive up during the distribution and we will put the box of fresh vegetables and fruits in the car. This is made possible through our partnership with the **Cleveland Food Bank**, along with our other sponsors, **Giant Eagle**, **Lowes**, **Meijer**, **Heinen's** and **Laketrans**. The market is operated by community, staff and student volunteers. Mark your calendars!

The location alternates each month between Eastlake North High School and Willoughby South High School. Unless there is a holiday or other extenuating circumstances, we are open on the first Thursday of each month from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Upcoming Produce Market Dates:

- April 2: South High School
- May 7: North High School
- June 4: South High School



K.I.D.S. First Night

Your Kindergarten Journey Starts Here

For newly enrolled kindergarten students, we host a **K.I.D.S. First Night**. This evening event enables new students and their families to tour their elementary building, meet the staff, enjoy a dinner snack together and play learning games to help with their kindergarten readiness skills.

Please register for these April events by calling Christy Miller, 440-975-3749 or via email: christy.miller@weschools.org.

K.I.D.S. First Night Dates

All programs are held from 5:00 - 7:30 p.m.

- April 14:** Jefferson Elementary
- April 20:** Longfellow Elementary
- April 22:** Grant Elementary
- April 23:** Royalview Elementary
- April 30:** Edison Elementary

15th Annual Autism AwareNESS Dance

Sponsored by **Eastlake Middle School**, the **NESS Dance** began to create an awareness of the prevalence of autism, while also raising money to help fund opportunities and programming to support autistic individuals in our local community.

This year's dance marathon will be held on Saturday, April 25th, from noon to midnight at Eastlake Middle School.

To learn more or to donate to the event, contact Angela Minicello, angela.minicello@weschools.org.



K.I.D.S. First Night Learning Station

Around the District

Willoughby Rotary Speech Awards



Pictured left to right:
Nathan Milam, Sunny Freeman and
Avery Colonna

The **Willoughby Rotary** hosts the **Rotary Four Way Test Speech Contest** each year. This high school competition challenges students in grades 9-12 to write and deliver a speech in front of Rotary members and guests. Each student presented a seven-minute speech that was judged based on content, organization and delivery. The speeches focused on personal stories of truth, fairness, goodwill and benefit. English teachers **Mrs. Victoria Insley, South**, and **Ms. Jennifer Schendel, North**, cheered them on along with Avery's mother, **South teacher Mrs. Alison Colonna**. This year's award recipients were:

First Place: **Avery Colonna**, 10th grade, South
Second Place: **Sunny Freeman**, 11th grade, North
Third Place: **Nathan Milam**, 10th grade, North

Each student won a cash prize. Congratulations to the winners who delivered their speeches with passion and professionalism.

Having a Ball in Physical Education Class

In **Mrs. Mary Arnold's** physical education class at **Edison Elementary**, students enthusiastically practice ball-handling skills and basic tennis techniques, discovering how movement and activity can boost their physical and mental well-being. Physical education teachers know that exposing children to sports early builds lifelong healthy habits and meaningful social engagement opportunities. For many, PE class is where they get their first introduction to a sport they may decide to play throughout their life. Mrs. Arnold shared, "The real joy comes from seeing students show pride in themselves and their classmates as they master proper techniques and apply them in fun, cooperative game playing." We are serving up confidence as well as tennis balls at Edison!



From English Assignment to Published Poet



Setting out to be a published author wasn't on **Isabelle Bostic's** to-do list, but it happened. An assignment in English class at **Eastlake North High School** resulted in a heartfelt poem, "The Fox," about nature and the vulnerability of the human spirit. It was included in the book *Sparked*, a collection of poetry by author Stephen C. Stephens.

Isabelle is honored, but also modest about the opportunity to be featured and recognized. She is currently a student in the Interactive Media program through Excel TECC. Her true passion is becoming a video editor and perhaps directing one day. Whether expressing herself through words or video images, her future looks bright.

Brewing Success: Willowick Middle Students Launch "Cozy Corner Cafe"

The **Willowick Middle School Career Connections** class took hands-on learning to a whole new level by hosting the **Cozy Corner Cafe**, a "pop-up cafe" for our hardworking staff! From perfecting the perfect pour to managing the rush at the register, our students stepped into the roles of baristas, food preparers, cashiers and delivery personnel. They demonstrated hustle, teamwork, and real-world skills needed to run a successful small business. At Willoughby-Eastlake, we are investing in their future! Thanks to **Serpentini Chevrolet of Willoughby Hills** for their donation which provided the start-up capital for the venture.



Music and Memories

Thanks to a generous grant from an individual and the **United Way of Lake County**, the **Fine Arts Association** has been visiting special education classes across all of our campuses. The students listen to the adults play, but even better they participate and make their own music.

Creating engaging experiences, sparking joy and making connections are part of our promises to the community.

Community partners are vital to that success.



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!



willoughbyeastlakecityschools



Willoughby-Eastlake Schools



@WESchools

W-E Schools Distinguished Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony

DATE: Friday, May 1, 2026

TIME: 6 - 8 p.m.

PLACE: Regovich Catering
33150 Lakeland Boulevard
Eastlake, OH 44095

TICKETS: \$25 per person

RECEPTION: Dinner Appetizers
Cash Bar

PROGRAM: Music Performance
Award Presentations
Honoree Remarks

Inductees

Dr. Charles H. Hannum
Eastlake North High School Class of 1967

Douglas Stephen Hart
Willoughby South High School Class of 1993

Dr. Daniel G. Isom
Eastlake North High School Class of 1995

Julie Crocker
Eastlake North High School Class of 1999

Citizen of the Year

Richard J. Regovich



Scan to Purchase
Your Tickets