WESTLAKE ACADEMY FOUNDATION

JUST THE FAQ's, PLEASE!

2026-27 Blacksmith Annual Fund
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's)

1. **What is the Blacksmith Annual Fund and why is it important?**
   Each year, the Westlake Academy Foundation directs the Blacksmith Annual Fund (BAF) campaign, a donation drive that provides financial support for the current school year's operations. Parents, grandparents, school leadership, faculty/staff, alumni, corporations and foundations are all invited to contribute annually. Blacksmith donations are important for two key reasons:

   a. Westlake Academy maintains a high level of instruction and academic curriculum as evidenced by its top national and state rankings. Parents choose to send their children to Westlake Academy because of this high caliber education. Annual donations are essential to maintaining current instructional levels as well as continuing to improve and expand educational opportunities. The Academy's ability to grow, improve, and excel is dependent upon receiving the budgeted Blacksmith Fund contribution.

   b. Like independent school districts (ISDs), WA receives State funds based on the student average daily attendance. UNLIKE local ISDs, the Academy DOES NOT RECEIVE funds from a dedicated school property tax. Blacksmith donations are vital to closing the annual budget funding gap.

2. **How much does the Blacksmith Fund need to raise for the 2026-27 school year?**
   After determining expenses and revenues from State and local sources, the WA administration has asked the Foundation to raise a minimum of **$1,500,000 ($1.5M)** to support the FY27 operating budget. **This year, each family is asked to donate at least $3,700 PER STUDENT to help fill the funding gap in the school budget.** We are grateful for families who can give more, and we understand those who may need to give less. We ask every family to give the best, most personally meaningful donation possible! Some call giving to the school a responsibility, others call it an honor. As an invested stakeholder, this is your opportunity to ensure your children's premium IB education and to keep Westlake Academy an elite IB world school.

3. **How does the Blacksmith Annual Fund work?**
   Since its opening in 2003, WA has relied on public support (i.e., State and municipal) and private donations (i.e., WA families and friends) to fund annual school operations and program growth. The Blacksmith campaign strives to build a spirit of collective support among parents, grandparents, faculty/staff, alumni and the broader community. We gratefully receive donations ranging from $50.00–$100,000. Whatever gift amount works best for your family's budget, know that your support absolutely matters. Generosity comes in all sizes!

   To raise this year's $1.5M need, the Blacksmith campaign will kick off in mid-August at the Back-to-School event. We encourage families to begin planning their Blacksmith contributions for the annual **North Texas Giving Day (NTGD)** fundraising event, which will be on **September 17, 2026.** Early giving on the NTGD site starts on Aug. 27. This is our 14th year participating in NTGD and we've come to call it "Blacksmith Giving Days." Officially, the Blacksmith campaign runs Aug. 1 – Oct. 31; non-donor families will be solicited after the Giving Day event. Of course, donations are gratefully accepted throughout the year. Gifts must be received by the fiscal year end on 6/30/27. Give the full amount for Giving Day, commit an amount and pay in monthly installments, pledge now and give later. Contribute whenever and however is best for your family…but **PLEASE GIVE!**

   Family names are recognized in the weekly all-school Communique, on the Foundation website, in the annual Impact Report, and through various social media channels. We also report parent participation rates by grade level each week. Individual donation amounts are CONFIDENTIAL and are never listed publicly. Please let us know if you'd like your family's giving to remain anonymous.

4. **How are Blacksmith funds used?**
   Every dollar – 100% – of BAF donations will be transferred quarterly to the Academy to fill the $1.5M gap and cover operational expenses that *directly impact* student education. Like most schools, WA faculty/staff salaries and benefits account for approximately 80% of the school's budget. These are critical dollars!

5. **How does our status as a municipally-owned charter school affect our budget?**
   The State of Texas provides limited funding for the physical buildings and maintenance of charter schools. As such, most charter schools are forced to rent or buy their buildings and absorb the cost. Uniquely, the Town of Westlake – as the school's charter-holder – pays the Academy's building debt, major building maintenance and repairs, and contributes toward shared services (e.g., human resources, communications).

6. **Why can't we operate the school with the State allotment?**
   With a K-12 student body of just over 900 students, WA lacks the economies of scale enjoyed by the larger surrounding ISDs. A large district can demand price breaks on everything from books and supplies to contract services and cafeteria food. We simply don't have this buying power. Also, being an IB school has inherent additional costs (e.g., maintaining IB certification, paying annual IB fees, attending required IB trainings). Plus, the Academy compensates teachers more than many charter schools and remains extremely competitive with area ISDs, which helps us recruit and retain a best-in-class faculty. Westlake Academy works to stretch every dollar and simply cannot maintain a high level of instruction without substantial funding through charitable donations given through the Blacksmith Annual Fund campaign.

7. **What happens if we do not meet our goal?**
   There are three possible consequences for failing to raise the **$1.5M** in necessary funds:
   - **a.** The school would be forced to reduce costs and services to balance the budget.
   - **b.** The school would have to dip into the reserve fund balance to cover any funding gap for operating expenses. The fund balance is a one-time funding source and once used, it would need to be replenished; otherwise, costs and services would have to be reduced.
   - **c.** Continued lack of parental support for the Blacksmith Fund would compel school leaders to consider other revenue sources. Currently, the most viable source available is State funding for additional students. This would increase class sizes and could impact the quality of our IB education.

8. **What is the "fund balance" and why can't we use that money to balance the budget?**
   The State of Texas recommends that public schools maintain a minimum general fund balance of 45 operating days. This reserve protects the Academy in the event of an emergency and allows it to deal with one-time expenditures such as major capital projects. The risk of both natural and man-made disasters (e.g., reduced state funding) requires that WA maintain this balance to ensure the uninterrupted education of our children.

9. **What are the consequences of low participation in the BAF?**
   When donor families see recent parent participation hovering around 70%, frankly, there are hard feelings. Prevailing sentiments include "everyone can give something!" and "it's not fair to use resources without donating to the school you chose." Understandably, non-participation by approximately 30% of WA's parent body evokes negative emotions, which simply isn't good for the morale and culture of the Academy community.

   Additionally, lower levels of Blacksmith Fund participation inhibit our ability to secure outside funds through grants. Most grant applications require information regarding levels of participation from invested parties like parents and board members. Most foundations will not award grants to a school that cannot inspire support from its own families.

10. **Can't proceeds from the Town of Westlake's property tax fund the school?**
    It must be clearly noted that Westlake residents already pay a school tax to the school district in which their home is zoned (i.e., Carroll, Keller or Northwest ISD). **THESE TAX DOLLARS DON'T GO TO WESTLAKE ACADEMY AND THEY DON'T BENEFIT WESTLAKE ACADEMY.** Academy families

come from Westlake and surrounding communities and we all pay school taxes to ISDs that our WA students do not attend. Regardless of where we live, if our children are at Westlake Academy and enjoying the benefits of this elite IB education, it is each of our responsibility to help fund this school we've chosen.

11. **How is the budget monitored and can I see regular reports?**
    The 2026-27 operating budget is posted on the Westlake Academy Financial Transparency website for review at any time. Additionally, the Foundation directors and staff are always available for questions, as are the WA Board of Trustees. We strive for transparency in this most important initiative to support our children's pursuit of academic excellence.

12. **Why doesn't the school just require or "make" families contribute?**
    As an open-enrollment public charter school, Westlake Academy cannot require parents to donate. Charitable giving must be voluntary; however, there is a STRONG EXPECTATION that when families choose Westlake Academy, they will help maintain the school's excellent programs with financial contributions.

13. **I give to other organizations benefiting the school; do I have to give to Blacksmith, too?**
    Giving to *any* organization that benefits WA students and teachers is a wonderful show of support, but the Foundation's Blacksmith Annual Fund campaign is an actual line-item in the Academy's annual operating budget. This year's $1.5M must be raised to balance the budget. Blacksmith donations ensure that Westlake Academy continues to provide a high-quality learning environment, ongoing faculty professional development, and excellent learning opportunities that help all students achieve their fullest potential. Every family has a vested interest in maintaining the Academy Advantage and donating to the BAF campaign!

14. **Is my contribution tax-deductible?**
    Yes! The Westlake Academy Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation and all Blacksmith Annual Fund contributions are tax-deductible to the fullest extent allowed by law.

15. **How can I make my Blacksmith contribution?**
    The Foundation has several payment options to make giving as easy and flexible as possible:
    - Cash/check for full gift amount
    - Credit card for full gift amount
    - Credit card charged in equal monthly installments (paid by 6/30/27)
    - Debit your bank account in equal monthly installments (paid by 6/30/27)
    - Donor-advised fund check for full gift amount -or- in equal installments (paid by 6/30/27)
    - Stock or Securities for full gift amount (shares sold upon receipt)

    AND….please talk with your employer's Human Resources department to find out if your company has a **MATCHING GIFT PROGRAM.** If so, you could double your Blacksmith contribution!

16. **Who can I contact with further questions?**
    Should you have any questions, concerns or need clarification on any points regarding the Blacksmith Annual Fund, please contact Dr. Shelly Myers, the Executive Director of the Westlake Academy Foundation, at 817-490-5722 or SMyers@WestlakeAcademy.org.

WESTLAKE ACADEMY
FOUNDATION

THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING WESTLAKE ACADEMY STUDENTS AND TEACHERS!