

Willow Creek Elementary School
School Improvement Committee/Accountability Committee
Minutes for September 18, 2025
5:00 pm

Attendees: Julia Apte (parent, chair), Danielle Nichols (parent), Hayley Neal (parent), Monica Felman (parent), Kat Walsh (parent), Laura Stephens (parent), Ana Schwander (parent), Chris Domino (tech), Mary Whitney (principal)

1. Welcome and Introductions (Julia Apte)
Julia welcomed everyone and commented on our wonderful turnout, giving credit to Laura for a great job of recruiting participants. We went around the room with Introductions.
2. What the School Improvement Committee Does (Chris Domino)
This committee is a partnership among staff, parents, and community members. By state law, we are part of the Colorado accreditation process. We meet a minimum of four times a year. We review and analyze data and discuss the school's improvement goals and annual plan. The Unified Improvement Plan (UIP) is submitted to the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) in the fall. We discuss the school budget and staffing plans in the spring. Chris handed out a one-page list flyer about school accountability committees.

This committee is one way you can participate in our school community; we also have Coffee with the Principal, which is more informal and offers a chance to have wide-ranging conversations, and PTO, which provides information, ways to volunteer, and chances to raise funds to pay for things the budget does not cover.
3. District Accountability Committee (DAC) Updates (Chris Domino)
I was unable to attend the September meeting, but the first meeting of the year is always an introduction to the work of the DAC committee. It has the same responsibilities as our own committee, but with a district lens. It is a great place to get a good overview of how our district works and an opportunity to meet district administrators.
4. PTO
 - a. We now have a "Wildcat Supporter of the Month" parking space.
 - b. The pledge thermometer is currently at \$27,000, which is a little better than it was last year. We have added a QR code at the top of the principal's message and the Thursday Folder. Scanning the code takes parents directly to the pledge page. It is an attempt to get around the cumbersome method of pledging in PTO Toolkit. Campus has a method that is outside of the login for PTO Toolkit and gets better results. We're working on making the process better.
 - c. Movie Night is September 26th.

5. Principal's Report (Mary Whitney)

a. What's New

1. Our most difficult problem is that we are now down to three teachers at each grade level; fewer students enrolling for this school year means we have been given less staffing. The result was that one of our specials teachers had to go. Mike decided to take on Art as well as STEM to create a STEAM class. He's doing a wonderful job and you will see the great art posted around the school.
2. The good news is that we're 24 students over projected enrollment, which get us more staffing next year. The bad news is that we don't get extra staffing now, and as a result we must absorb them into existing classrooms.
3. We are continuing Foundations this year, which is a systematic approach using the science of reading to students in K-3. We have a coach coming in 5 times this year.
4. We are continuing to meet in professional learning communities (PLCs) every Wednesday afternoon. PLCs are a powerful driver of excellence. Each grade-level team works on the four fundamental questions:

What is it that we want our students to learn?

How will we know if they have learned it?

How will we respond for students who do not learn it?

How will we respond if they already know it?

As a PLC, the teachers on your child's grade-level team look at every child. Your kid doesn't have just his/her teacher, but the whole team, and may get to work with any of those other team teachers.

5. Fifteen-Day Challenge: The district provides a coach to help support the work of PLCs. This year, the teams are working on very short-term, 15-day goals that look closely at very specific pieces of the standards to meet student needs.
6. Parent Question: What differentiation, other than WINN, is our school using?
Answer: WINN (What I Need Now) is a school-wide differentiation strategy. It is a dedicated time for deploying flexible groups; kids move to the group they need at that point in time and may move to another group as their needs change. Groups range from low to high. Summer (our GT teacher) and other learning specialists help teach these flexible groups. Grade-level teams may differentiate, depending on the student needs they identify. Fifth grade differentiates in Math, for instance.

b. Community Questions (Questions Submitted Ahead of Time)

1. *Can there be clubs on Wednesdays?* No, because teachers need their spaces for the PLC work they do on that day. But the empty classrooms

could perhaps be used — Mary will think about that. We already have 17 clubs going right now.

2. *Do you do anything to solicit clubs?* No, people come to Mary. The district requires that clubs must have insurance and do facility registration; then we need to find a space for them.
3. *How come we don't have an ID checking machine in the office?* We do have one — it's called the Raptor system. It consists of a scanner, a laptop dedicated to the Raptor software, and a badge printer. There's a description of the procedure on one of our webpages:
<https://willowcreek.cherrycreekschools.org/parents/welcome>
4. *What about the digital Colorado ID?* Because the system can't scan a cell phone screen, a digital ID doesn't work directly with Raptor. However, the school secretary can type in the information on the digital ID and pull up the person on the system. Action: We should contact district security to ask if scanning a digital ID is a feature in the system or request that they ask Raptor to add this feature.
5. *In light of the Evergreen High School shooting last week, how does the school keep our children safe?*
 - a. All staff members know to check strangers within the building or on school grounds for a Raptor badge. Paras are instructed to ask people walking their dogs to please avoid coming on our property.
 - b. We now have push locks on all our doors — no one has ever been killed behind a locked door.
 - c. She and Kelly have walkie-talkies that can call a lockdown from anywhere in the building. As part of the intercom system, lockdown messages appear on the Valcom digital message boards in every room.
 - d. October 21st is a lockdown drill at lunchtime (not an easy time, but we need to practice different scenarios). Mary will let parents know that the drill is coming and will send out a letter with details. Is there any narrative around lockdown drills? Mary has a script that does not mention shooters.
 - e. The district has a standardized protocol with uniform language for situations requiring a response. This protocol is printed on posters in every room and is provided by the I Love You Guys Foundation. (Mary pointed out the one in the library and reviewed each protocol.)
 - f. We have a Red Bag in every classroom or office: it comes with a tag with a unique QR code assigned to that room and allows the adult in the room to scan the code for immediate connection to the emergency response team. It also has supplies like Smarties for diabetics, bandages and a tourniquet for wounds. Mary showed the Red Bag kept in the library.

- g. One parent's kid said that they have lockdown drills in case someone who is not allowed to be there comes into school.
 - h. Of course we have substitute teachers from time to time. Fortunately, our subs are often the same, and subs are given written instructions on all these SRPs.
- c. CMAS Results
1. Mary walked everyone through the slide show about our CMAS results. The slides are posted on our website's accountability page:
<https://resources.finalsite.net/images/v1758752903/cherrycreekschoolsorg/zeklw62itevj9qoab7v3/WillowCreek2025ElementaryCMASDataSlidesforAccountability.pdf>
 - a. After the introductory slides, the cover page of the Willow Creek School Performance Framework (SPF) appears on slide 4. This is our rating based on Spring 2025 data. We were a little disappointed that we dropped from last year, but that is largely because the 2024 growth results were so remarkably high. Mary explained how the SPF rating is calculated and why heavier weighting of growth vs. achievement affects the overall score. Chris distributed handouts breaking out our performance against CCSD schools near us.
 - b. We reviewed slides 5–7 (detailed breakouts of achievement in ELA, Math, and Science) and discussed in particular the ELA (English Language Achievement) scores. We are not doing as well on the writing convention subtests as we would like, and we have added a goal around writing to our UIP for 2025-26. In fact, tomorrow's in-service day will focus on the writing portion of the ELA for grades 3, 4, and 5.
 2. Questions and Comments
 - a. *Why don't we teach keyboarding?* That is very much a grade-level decision. Our school day is packed with no extra time. We do pay for a keyboarding program that is used at first, third, and fourth (Keyboarding Without Tears). **Action:** Have the teachers at this grade level communicate with parents about the program.
 - b. *Do we offer teachers any training in AI?* The district just adopted a policy around the use of Artificial Intelligence in June. We are just beginning a rollout.
 - c. *Why are so many kids anxious?* The district does have a social-emotional learning (SEL) program and conducts a screening program twice a year (Panorama). Our students just took the fall screening; we will share the results at our next meeting. The staff looks at the results and plans what areas to work on based on the data. Our spring results usually show improvement from the fall.

- d. *Do you teach executive functioning?* Cynthia Bernero, our school psychologist, is offering to do a training for our teachers. Our students are showing somewhat of a decrease in this area; Julia mentioned that she thinks 5th grade does a lot to work on that. Those teachers are trying to prepare students for middle school where they have up to 7 teachers. Can fifth grade share with teachers below them that emphasis on organization?
- e. *Does Willow Creek get money for kids on IEP?* Not dollars, but staffing is allocated by how many students are on IEPs. Right now we have two full-time teachers, plus three paras for these students.