

# Westlake High School

Westlake City School District

Westlake, Ohio

Superintendent: James Costanza

Principal: George Scheckelhoff

<http://westlake.k12.oh.us/whs/index.htm>

Many factors contribute to the solid academic gains made by all students including students with disabilities at Westlake High School – strong leadership, caring teachers, a culture where students want to be smart because “it is cool to be smart,” supportive parents, and the integration of special education services into the general education classes to insure all students receive and are accountable for meeting the state content standards.

To examine the high school, a look at the district as a whole is important. The district Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP) contains seven goals focused on a three-year period. The seven goals are high student performance; programs and interventions that meet individual needs of each student; aligned curriculum and assessments; meaningful and ongoing communication; learning opportunities strengthened through affiliations and acquisition; integration of research and technology; and designation as an excellent school district. Observable and measurable performance indicators were established for each of the goals. Building School Improvement Plans (BIPs) directly reflect the district CIP and have corresponding performance indicators and action plans.

SCHOOL PROFILE	
2003-2004 Building Rating	Excellent
Grade Levels	9-12
Enrollment	1,174
Economically Disadvantaged Students	0.9%
Students with Disabilities	10.9%
Asian or Pacific Islander	4.2%
White Students	94.0%

## Curriculum and Instruction

Four years ago, George Scheckelhoff became the principal of Westlake High School in Westlake, Ohio, a suburban community of 32,000 people in the Greater Cleveland Metropolitan area. He followed a succession of four principals in five previous years and found that the staff and students were in great need of direction and a building of trust. Students were in control of the school. Mr. Scheckelhoff undertook a number of initiatives that restored stability. Department chairs were reinstated and were expected to lead their respective departments. Mr. Scheckelhoff continues to involve the Department Chairs in all decisions, and they have grown in the positions. They meet once a month with their department people, once a month with the principal, and once a month with Jim Lloyd. Special education staff members meet once a month with all department chairs. Under Mr. Scheckelhoff’s strong leadership, an environment of empowerment and collaboration has been fostered, and a spotlight was put on data based instruction.

WESTLAKE DISTRICT PROFILE	
2003-2004 District Rating	Excellent
District Enrollment	3,686

A significant role in the systemic development and integration of all

***An environment of empowerment and collaboration has been fostered and a spotlight was put on data based instruction.***

elements of instruction is that of the Director of Pupil Services, Jim Lloyd. When he arrived, Mr. Lloyd found no continuity or symmetry in the special education program. He used his role with special education and district administration to integrate special education services into the general education classes as well as to insure that all students receive and are accountable for meeting the state content standards. Test results indicate students with disabilities are meeting these standards with 100% scoring proficient or above on the reading and mathematics section of the Ohio Graduation Test (OGT) during the 2003-2004 school year.

Other activities instituted by Mr. Lloyd include a review of the Intervention Assistance Team (IAT) process and an examination of the continuing collaboration efforts between regular education and special education teachers. Mr. Lloyd is also responsible for developing interview questions that assure all administrators hired by the district have buy-in as well as a sound, functional knowledge of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and special education rules and regulations.

Mr. Scheckelhoff and Mr. Lloyd worked on a major goal of having teachers develop common assessments that in turn would lead instruction. Amy Smith from Kent State was hired to work with all the high school teachers, including the special education teachers, to tie the assessments t

o state standards. In team teaching, both regular and special education teachers prioritize power indicators and review the assessment map to make certain students are getting the standards and are being assessed properly. Now Mr. Scheckelhoff, Mr. Lloyd, and the teachers work together annually to analyze student data to improve classroom practices both vertically and horizontally. This analysis is then transferred into an action plan.

Lloyd reported that the State Improvement Grant (SIG) had a great impact on K-8 that is now being reflected in the high school students. Mr. Lloyd praises a product from the Ohio Department of Education, *Standards-Based Education in Ohio – Providing Access to the General Curriculum for Students with Disabilities*. He noted that the beauty of that product is that it can be used for regular and special educators as well as parents. Mr. Lloyd used that product's rubric, *Connecting the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) to the Academic Content Standards*, to train teachers to create IEPs (a standards-based IEP is used) that were individualized and not "canned." Using the rubric, Lloyd conducts reviews of randomly selected IEPs to continue to assure alignment with the content standards.

Curriculum alignment with state standards has been completed K-12. Pacing guides and common assessments have been developed over the past year for grades K-12 in math and language arts. Science and social studies are in place and ready to follow next year. A report card based on the state standards will soon be put in use at the secondary level. It is based on the one that was developed and is in use in grades K-6.

To accompany these efforts, data management systems have been developed and are ready to run. The assessment data collected will continue to be used for instruction for learning. Instructional resources, model lesson plans, courses of study and professional development sites will be linked.

The teaming efforts between regular and special education have proven beneficial in a number of ways. One regular math teacher who has teamed with a special education teacher found that she is now able to successfully teach special

education students even without another teacher in the room. Working with the special education teacher when teaching Algebra B (algebra is broken down and covered in 2 years), she has acquired the strategies, tools and techniques needed to teach students with IEPs. Realizing that her approach needed to change, she loosened the structure of her classes and added humor as well as computer lab activities interspersed with traditional math work. She also has found she needed to ask questions differently. Following the modeling the special education teacher provided, she is now able to work with autistic students without spending time disciplining. She stated, "I look forward to class and can now teach all kids."

One teacher noted that English classes at the high school have completely changed to reflect the Ohio Graduation Test (OGT). All teachers and students use the same identified key words in their daily work. This helps all students with the language on the OGT. The summer reading program changed from the number of novels read based on the type of class to a consistent number and type. Teachers communicate at least weekly with special education teachers on the progress, assignments, or problems for each student. Some teachers utilize their web page for the communication.

The special education teachers team teach subjects in which they are highly qualified so that the needs of all students can better be met. However, special education teachers are used more for teaming and testing. Each special education teacher teams for one period with a regular education teacher, then provides small group instruction for students who may benefit from that setting. Teachers' caseloads include teaching students with various disabilities. For the coming school year, there will be 160 students with IEPs. The majority of students with disabilities are in the regular classes most of the time.

***The majority of students with disabilities are in the regular classes most of the time.***

Mr. Scheckelhoff noted that by the time the students get to high school, the K-8 staff members have done a really good job with them. To build on those efforts, Westlake staff members work to make the transition to high school as easy as possible for students with disabilities. The

***"There is nothing new or novel. It comes down to the fact that inclusion works."***

***George Scheckelhoff, principal***

Department Chair goes to the middle school to attend the IEP meetings held at the end of the year for the students who will be entering Westlake. Westlake then brings middle school staff (intervention specialist, CD specialist, etc.) to the high school for a day to meet with the high school staff, including the counselor, who will work with the students when they attend Westlake. Students' particular needs are discussed, as well as how each might deal with the high school curriculum. There is a Frosh Fest for all the incoming students.

Westlake staff members are making great progress in helping many students with disabilities close the gap in achievement that had previously existed. Mr. Scheckelhoff notes, "There is nothing new or novel. It comes down to the fact that inclusion works." Mr. Scheckelhoff reports that more severely impaired students typically stay in school for an additional year or two to complete work-study or other vocational training. The principal also reported that a few students are in alternate placements in

***Unique to Westlake is their Academic Coaching program.***

Cleveland, but some of these students move in and out of the alternative setting as they are able. These students are diligently monitored.

### **Opportunities for All Students to Achieve**

Unique to Westlake is their Academic Coaching program. This state of the art program provides an array of services for all students so they can get help with any of their academic needs. The academic coaching room is available all day to be used by all students to meet with teachers or peers when they have questions about the work, to make up missed work, to take tests they missed due to absence, to get help in specific courses, and to take practice OGT tests. The classroom contains files of sample tests students may use to practice the types of questions they can expect on the OGT. The tests are separated into subjects so that students may work on parts they find troubling without doing work that is not problematic.

Students can assign themselves to the academic coaching program during their regular study halls. Some students come in for only one period for help on an assignment. However, most students are referred to the program. At the beginning of each quarter, teachers and counselors identify students who are failing courses. Students typically stay for that quarter but may complete the work prior to that time or may extend beyond the quarter. Parents can refer their teens to the academic coaching program; they also can remove them from the program, but typically do not do so. It is important to note that the academic coaching room is viewed as a privilege. Should a student misbehave there, a call is made to report the misbehavior to the parent and the student is returned to study hall.

While students have regular access to classroom teachers who work in the coaching room one period at a time, peer tutors are extremely popular. The academic coaching teacher, a former special education teacher, goes to study halls at the beginning of each quarter and requests volunteers for the various subjects. The peer tutor approach makes for a more inviting and productive atmosphere for the students. (In addition to the hour they spend in the academic coaching room, teachers are also available before and after school to help students.)

It is stressed that students are responsible for their own learning. Students need to ask questions when they don't understand. Teachers are open to answering all questions. Mr. Scheckelhoff believes that the Academic Coaching is the key to progress being made at Westlake. He states, "We re-teach – academic coaching – we give students all the help we can. We are using the assessments to re-teach what students need. I have never had a student not graduate due to a proficiency barrier."

The academic coaching teacher noted, "This type of program could be set up in other schools with one teacher, an aide, and many peer tutors who get credit. Having this support during the day rather than after school is very valuable." She added, "Web support can be another valuable component."

Behavioral expectations and discipline procedures are consistent district-wide. At the beginning of the school year, parents and students are given a planner containing a handbook spelling out both expectations and procedures. School staff members meet with students the first days of school to review the handbook and to discuss issues that could result in disciplining action. The students then have four

***The principal tells students who are referred to him that "Discipline isn't personal. It is business."***

days to learn the contents of the handbook before consequences for misbehavior take effect. When in-school suspension is used as one of the consequences, there is no academic penalty. The principal tells students who are referred to him that “Discipline isn’t personal. It is business.”

Academic teachers give detentions for cuts. In addition to receiving a one-on-one talk, students given detentions are provided a “Think Sheet” that helps them write about what they can learn from the experience. Both students and teachers take the Think Sheets very seriously. Teachers report no repeaters.

As a part of the collaborative culture at Westlake, students have had an active role in redesigning some of the aspects related to the high school. For example, seniors with a 2.0 Grade Point Average (GPA) had been allowed to go off campus for lunch as one measure to deal with overcrowding. However, students were not returning to school on time or not coming back at all. While Mr. Scheckelhoff was inclined to do away with the off-campus lunch option, he realized that discontinuing it would be very unpopular with the students, and, after all, it did help with the overcrowding. He turned to the students and requested their input about what to do. Students met and decided to make the senior lunch a privilege. They decided that when a student abuses the off-campus lunch option, the privilege is lost for the year. The student response has been positive.

### **Professional Development**

The major goals of the CIP and BIP call for a focus on identifying staff needs and providing the training needed to implement the CIP and SIP. The district gives 100 days for staff to work on continuous improvement. Each department is provided three to five days to meet as a department to align the curriculum, assessments, and reporting system to the standards.

Administrators at the building and the district level go through all the in-house trainings the teachers receive. Those trainings include professional development by experts who were hired to assist teachers with the alignment and mapping activities. All participated when Doug Reeves and Margaret Searle were brought in to help teachers align curriculum and identify power indicators and when Amy Smith helped the staff to link the goals and standards.

In addition to the professional development that is brought into the school, teachers also have an option of participating in training at conferences and meetings. Teachers requesting professional leave to participate in such activities must demonstrate how the training fits with the CIP goals before being permitted to attend. Upon returning from a conference or other training, teachers are expected to share information gained with other staff members at a staff or department meeting.

### **Partnerships with Parents, Families, and Community**

The Westlake partnership with parents and families is strong. In addition to the principal’s monthly newsletter, parents can communicate with all the teachers via the school’s Web site where they also have access to teachers’ calendars, homework assignments, worksheets, etc. Many of the teachers have grades online that parents can access via password. Parents of students with disabilities also have password access to their student’s IEP. Information about the district is also available on a local cable channel.

The very active Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) conducts 26 to 28 school-related activities each year. Two years ago the charter was changed to allow students to be members. The principal serves as vice president of the group.

In addition to the school-sponsored group, two years ago the parents of Westlake formed the Westlake Parent Connection in an effort to promote positive healthy behavior of students during Homecoming and other school activities. This highly visible, vocal group uses its strength to pressure other parents into being accountable for their children by sponsoring programs for both parents and students. The focus of the group's efforts is sponsoring information nights for parents and students with speakers from the police department, courts, and drug programs. These programs are blunt in their messages. Another important component, The Family Pledge Directory, was compiled for parents so they could check on the whereabouts and activities of their child while at friends' homes. Choosing to sign the Family Pledge and allowing parents' names and phone numbers to appear in the Family Pledge Directory serves two important purposes:

It encourages an open dialog between parents and their children regarding substance abuse and family expectations.

It empowers parents by connecting a network of families who have taken the Family Pledge and have gone public with their support of these community norms.

Students are also active on their own. Student Council members conduct a number of activities to raise between \$20,000 and \$30,000 per year for a charity of the group's choosing. Another leadership group, consisting of approximately 40 hand-picked students, takes ownership of the Westlake building through a number of initiatives such as building beautification projects and a wellness retreat.

The school also has strong ties with the local police and fire departments, West Shore Chamber of Commerce, area businesses and the local hospital. These groups provide shadowing and mentoring activities. Work experiences for students, including special education students, are provided by businesses such as the hospital and Bonnie Bell.

## **Culture**

An environmental survey was recently conducted for students and staff. In the survey results, the culture of Westlake was described as ever-changing and student-focused. The survey results confirm the principal's statement, "The student is at the heart of everything we do."

Students say their teachers are their reason for coming to school. Parents report that Westlake teachers and counselors are caring and involved and are proactive in helping students. They note that the teachers are concerned with both the physical and mental well being of the students as well as the academics. One parent reported that her daughter is successful because of the daily contact she has with her teachers through phone calls, email, and daily journal. Parents also liked and appreciated having the grades and assignments on line.

***The survey results confirm the principal's statement, "The student is at the heart of everything we do."***

Special education students and their parents report that they feel they are listened to and their input is valued when they participate in IEP meetings. All teachers honor the accommodations and/or modifications noted on the IEP. Some students noted that they are able to receive study guides, cue words, or assignments ahead of time to compensate for their reading delays. Other students stated that they have an extra set of textbooks at home to help with homework.

## Conclusion

Through collaborative efforts focusing on leadership, empowerment, alignment, and strong communication, Westlake High School has had a great impact on the well-being and academic success of all of its students. A staff committed to exploring research and utilization of data put in place the systemic and well-designed changes at both the high school and district that allowed the fulfillment of a goal of continuing to be designated as excellent and now becoming a School of Promise. These efforts created a shift in instruction that allows each student, including those with disabilities, to truly be successful. The Academic Coaching program provided an ongoing opportunity for students to get the help they need. An integral part of this success is the role of parents and students as active partners in the education process at Westlake High School. With the necessary changes in practices and policies, Westlake High School has enhanced the outcomes and performance for all its students.

## What does the data say?

