

THE HEATWAVE

FALL 2025

THE BIANNUAL MAGAZINE OF WEST CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT



WCMS Sees Significant Growth in
State Prep Scores and School Culture




Postmarked with Love:
The Little Class with a Big Goal



Sisters Behind the Wheel:
The Women Who Keep West Central Moving

SMITH'S
Coin Laundry

Day 11	Day 12	Day 13
CHAPTERS 29-32	CHAPTERS 33-35	CHAPTERS 36-38
		

PROVIDING OPPORTUNITY, EXPECTING EXCELLENCE

Photo: Eighth-grade student Liam Winters proudly displays his work.



Contents

(4) **West Central** Launches Five-Year Strategic Plan

(5) **Building for the Future:**
West Central's 10-Year Life Safety Plan

(6) **A Fresh Start for Play:**
West Central Elementary's New Play-ground

(8) **West Central Middle School** Sees Significant Growth in State Prep Scores and School Culture

(10) **Beyond the Bell:**
Elementary Enrichment Program In-spires Young Minds

(12) **West Central Middle School** Student Spotlights

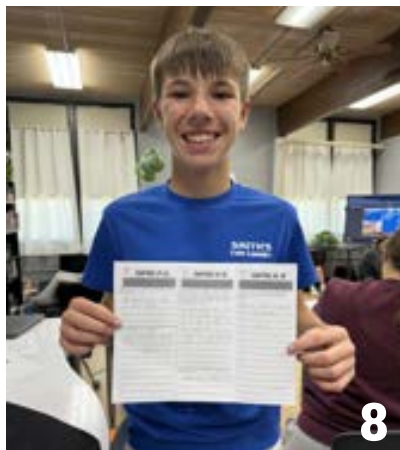
(14) **Student Council:**
Building Tomorrow's Leaders at WCHS

(16) **Postmarked with Love:**
The Little Class with a Big Goal

(18) **Trash into Treasure:**
Recycling Caps into a Place for Friend-ship

(20) **Playing It Forward:**
How Music Connects Students and Neighbors

(22) **Sisters Behind the Wheel:**
The Women Who Keep West Central Moving



Welcome to the Inaugural Edition of

THE HEATWAVE



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Hello West Central Community!

Welcome to the 2025 Fall Edition of the Heat Wave! We hope you take a few minutes to read this magazine to learn more about all of the great things that are happening at West Central. We know that for many of our stakeholders it is tough to stay connected to what is happening in the District, especially if you don't currently have students in the District. As we celebrate 20 years of West Central we feel now is a great time to showcase our students and staff!

This is my 4th year as a part of the West Central Family and one of the greatest things I've learned about our District is that it truly is a family. Lots of Districts out there say they are a family, but I've never been around a District who lives those words like we do here. Watching our staff pour their hearts into our students each and every day, fills my heart with more pride than I can put into words.

I'm excited for you to take a look inside of this magazine and find stories representing some of our kids, our staff, and some upcoming exciting projects! I hope you take a few minutes to read the impact of two of our bus drivers, who happen to be sisters, and the love they have for transporting our students. Together they have been driving a bus for over 70 years!

A project we are excited to showcase this year is the plan to upgrade our elementary playground. You'll be able to hear from Mrs. Lafary, Elementary Principal, what the plans are and why it's so important that we upgrade our space to make it inviting and safe for our students. We were able to share with the students pictures of the equipment at our PTC Fall Festival and it was so much fun to see their excitement! After reading this story, we hope you will also be excited about the upgrade. Then be on the lookout for how you can support the project!

Inside, you will also find stories highlighting our HS Student Council, Elementary Enrichment Club and a few MS Student Spotlights. I'm excited for you to read about our 3rd grade class from last year, who worked to receive cards from all 50 states for their 'Postmarked with Love' project. There are so many great things happening inside our walls at West Central, this is just a small sampling, but we are thrilled to share it with you.

I'm excited for you to have the opportunity to see more of what we are doing in the halls at West Central. We hope you enjoy seeing the great things happening and that you'll take a few minutes to stop by and visit to see in-person what West Central is all about. Enjoy what's inside these covers and we hope to see you soon!

Thank you for supporting West Central and all of our staff and students!

Stacey Day
Superintendent
Go Heat!

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West Central Launches Five-Year Strategic Plan

“To make West Central a destination school district that empowers each and every student, staff member, and community by cooperatively developing successful citizens for an ever changing world.”

This school year marks the beginning of an exciting new chapter for the West Central School District, as administrators, staff, and community members unite around a new five-year Strategic Plan. Rooted in the school’s mission of “providing opportunity, expecting excellence,” the plan outlines a clear roadmap to ensure that every West Central student thrives academically, socially, and personally from pre-K through high school graduation.

The Strategic Plan represents a district-wide commitment to continuous growth. The vision for these goals is: “To make West Central a destination school district that empowers each and every student, staff member, and community by cooperatively developing successful citizens for an ever-changing world.” The plan is built around four primary goals, each with measurable indicators of success that will guide the District’s work over the next several years.

Goal 1: Ensures that students receive instruction at their grade level according to the Illinois Learning Standards.

Goal 2: Concerns the social and personal growth of students as they learn to establish relationships with others, solve problems critically, and learn how to impact the community positively.

Goal 3: Exposing students from pre-K through 12th grade to a wide range of experiences and potential career routes.

Goal 4: Providing welcoming, clean, and safe learning environments for students, staff, and the community.

Goal 1: Curriculum Alignment and Academic Excellence

Of the specific goals the District is focusing on this year, one of the first priorities under Goal 1 – “Engaging students in rigorous and relevant core instruction, aligned to the Illinois Learning Standards” – is a comprehensive effort to strengthen curriculum alignment across all grade levels. Teachers will collaborate in both grade-level teams and vertical teams to map out the specific standards and skills students will master at each stage of their educational journey. This process will help create a clear game plan from kindergarten through high school graduation, ensuring that every student builds upon a consistent foundation of essential knowledge and skills.

By identifying priority standards as outlined by the state and developing a precise sequence of progression, West Central educators will be able to pinpoint exactly what students should know when they enter and exit each classroom. The result will be more cohesive instruction, stronger transitions between grades, and better preparation for college, careers, and life beyond high school. Superintendent Stacey Day explains that “It helps our teachers have a better idea of what each student should know and be able to do when they walk in their classroom and when they leave.”

Goal 4: Safe, Modern, and Inspiring Learning Spaces

Another area of early focus is improving facilities to support student safety, comfort, and engagement. Goal 4 of the plan emphasizes creating “welcoming and clean learning environments” and updating school facilities to meet modern needs.

The project of foremost importance is the enhancement of the playground spaces at the elementary and middle school levels over the summer. The District plans to upgrade equipment and expand play areas to provide safer, more enjoyable, and inclusive environments for students to learn, play, and grow.

These improvements reflect West Central’s belief that learning extends beyond the classroom walls. Playgrounds are vital spaces where children develop social skills, creativity, and resilience—all key components of the District’s broader vision for student success.

Looking Ahead

While these two initiatives – curriculum alignment and playground enhancements – represent the first steps in implementing the Strategic Plan, the District’s long-term vision encompasses much more. From expanding career exploration opportunities to supporting social-emotional learning and community partnerships, West Central’s roadmap reflects a holistic approach to education.

These early steps mark just the beginning of a larger effort to strengthen every aspect of the West Central learning experience. As West Central begins this five-year journey, the District’s focus remains on providing every student with the best opportunities to grow, achieve, and succeed from their first day of pre-K through their last day of high school and beyond.



Building for the Future: West Central's 10-Year Life Safety Plan

West Central School District has taken a significant step toward maintaining safe, healthy, and welcoming facilities with the approval of its 10-Year Life Safety Plan by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). This forward-looking plan outlines key building and infrastructure projects that will enhance safety, comfort, and efficiency across all schools over the next decade.

The initiative demonstrates West Central's unwavering commitment to the health, safety, and well-being of its students, staff, and the greater community. By planning ahead, the district ensures that schools remain strong, reliable, and ready to serve future generations.

What Is a Life Safety Plan?

In Illinois, every public school is required to maintain facilities that meet the standards of the Health/Life Safety Code for Public Schools. This code, overseen by the Illinois State Board of Education, establishes the minimum requirements needed to "protect the health, safety, and general welfare of pupils, school personnel, and others who use [school facilities]" (ISBE Health/Life Safety Code 180).

To comply with this code, schools conduct a 10-Year Life Safety Survey – a review of each building every decade by licensed architects or engineers – to identify areas that require updates or repairs to ensure safety and code compliance. Once approved, the plan guides school districts in completing necessary improvements within a realistic timeframe (ISBE Health/Life Safety Handbook).

Project Highlights

(A condensed list of approved projects)

- High School roof replacement
- Finish High School window replacements (courtyard & industrial shop)
- Middle School window upgrades
- Middle School boiler replacement
- Elementary entry door replacement
- Playground surface renewal at both the Elementary & Middle Schools
- New lockers at the Elementary School
- New flooring throughout all schools
- Replacement of ceiling heater units at the High School
- District-Wide door rekeying for improved security and safety
- Miscellaneous plumbing, electrical, and door upgrades

Building for the Future

While many of these projects may seem routine – like replacing flooring or upgrading boilers – each improvement plays a crucial role in ensuring that the district's schools remain safe, efficient, and welcoming learning environments.

By addressing maintenance proactively, West Central reduces emergency repairs and creates a more sustainable plan for building upkeep. From playground resurfacing to new security measures, these updates protect both the physical infrastructure and the people who use it every day.



A Fresh Start for Play: West Central Elementary's New Playground

For nearly four decades, the West Central Elementary playground has been the place imaginations run wild, friendships form, and laughter abound. But after years of wear and tear, the time has come for a well-deserved upgrade. Thanks to the teamwork of the district, the Elementary Parent-Teacher Committee (PTC), and the support of the Board of Education, a brand-new playground is set to become a reality– and it's a project that Principal Kathy Lafary has poured her heart into during her final year before retirement.

"The elementary playground is a busy place here at WCE!" Lafary said. "The current equipment is outdated and in need of many repairs." Some structures have already been taken down, and the merry-go-rounds are out of balance. Adding to that, replacement parts are difficult to find, and the ground cover no longer meets safety standards for the students.

Beyond updating the aging equipment, Lafary explained that layout changes are just as important. "In order for our staff to monitor all children, the basketball hoops and the four square area need to be moved closer to the playground," she said. "It's difficult for our teachers to supervise all areas due to the location of the equipment."

The new playground is also part of a larger vision. Superintendent Stacey Day explained that the project ties directly into the district's Strategic Plan. "One of the main goals in our Strategic Plan is connected to our facilities," she said. "At the October Board of Education meeting the Board approved the purchase of an \$8 million bond that will be used towards the projects listed in the 10-year survey," including a new playground. "It's a huge undertaking, but something that will benefit all of the students that walk through the halls of West Central for years to come!"

The Elementary PTC has been a driving force in raising the project off the ground. Over the past decade, they've raised around \$30,000 through events like the Annual Fall Festival. "The costs continue to rise, and we've only been able to purchase a few swings while saving for the new structure," Lafary said. A company will be chosen to complete the work of installing both new ground cover and equipment. "Throughout the process," Lafary said, "the elementary staff has been given a chance to make suggestions as they are the ones out there every day with our students. Their input was essential!"

The plans call for a complete transformation: removing all existing equipment and tire chips, adding new turf and a concrete walking path around the play area, and creating a new pad for basketball and four square. The new structure will feature multiple slides, a pebble bridge, a climbing apparatus, an obstacle course, sensory panels, and an inclusive merry-go-round.

Research shows that unstructured playtime helps children develop motor skills, creativity, and focus, as well as physical

"We celebrated when we added a few new swings– the students were so excited! I can't even begin to imagine what their response will be with a brand new playground!"

activity– benefits Lafary says will only grow with the new space. "We celebrated when we added a few new swings– the students were so excited! I can't even begin to imagine what their response will be with a brand new playground!"

Construction will begin shortly after the last day of school, with completion expected in time for students to enjoy the new playground in the fall of 2026.

As Lafary prepares to retire, the project feels especially meaningful. After years of leadership and dedication to West Central students, she'll leave behind something lasting– a playground that embodies both her hard work and the joyful spirit she's fostered. The community is eager to send her off in triumph, knowing that generations of children will play, learn, and grow in a space she helped bring to life.



Current playground at West Central



West Central Middle School Sees Significant Growth in State Prep Scores and School Culture

When Principal Brittney DeWeese stepped into her role at West Central Middle School (WCMS) in August 2024, she was met with a clear directive from her team of educators: improve state test scores and increase academic proficiency. From day one, she knew the school would need to hit the ground running.

The leadership team began by setting short-term goals in reading and math—an approach that yielded immediate improvement. Early successes were celebrated, helping to build morale and momentum before transitioning into more ambitious, long-term goals.

As the Illinois Assessment of Readiness (IAR) approached in March 2025, WCMS dedicated the six weeks leading up to the test as “IAR Test Prep Season.” Drawing inspiration from athletics, staff and students treated the preparation period like a sports season—setting goals, tracking progress, and working together to improve their performance.

During this time, the school implemented other key strategies including targeted small-group study sessions focused on specific skills, IAR Prep Day rotations that allowed for focused review and engagement, and rigorous academic tasks embedded into daily instruction to strengthen critical thinking and application skills. Along the way, administration “tweaked and adjusted [new methods], and tried out new creative things all along the way. We kept kids, laughter, and fun at the forefront as much as possible.”

These efforts paid off, with WCMS seeing measurable growth in student achievement and confidence.

The 5Essentials Survey

In addition to state test score growth, WCMS also saw marked improvement on the 5Essentials Survey, a research-based tool developed by the University of Chicago that measures school effectiveness in five areas linked to student success: Effective Leaders, Collaborative Teachers, Involved Families, Supportive Environment, and Ambitious Instruction.

The survey results highlighted WCMS’s organizational strength, earning an overall rating of “Organized for Improvement,” the second-highest category possible.

Here’s how WCMS performed across each domain:

Effective Leaders: Score of 66 (strong), +22 points
Collaborative Teachers: Score of 62 (strong), +29 points
Involved Families: Score of 51 (neutral), +19 points
Supportive Environment: Score of 46 (neutral), –5 points
Ambitious Instruction: Score of 51 (neutral), +6 points

These results reflect a school that’s not only improving academic outcomes but also strengthening its internal culture and community connections.

A Culture of Growth

While the test scores tell one story, DeWeese says the shift in mindset has been just as transformative.

“WCMS is a place where staff want to come to work every day,” she shared. “They are the type of people that kids want to work hard for. Our kids believe they can do hard things because their teachers tell them they can!”

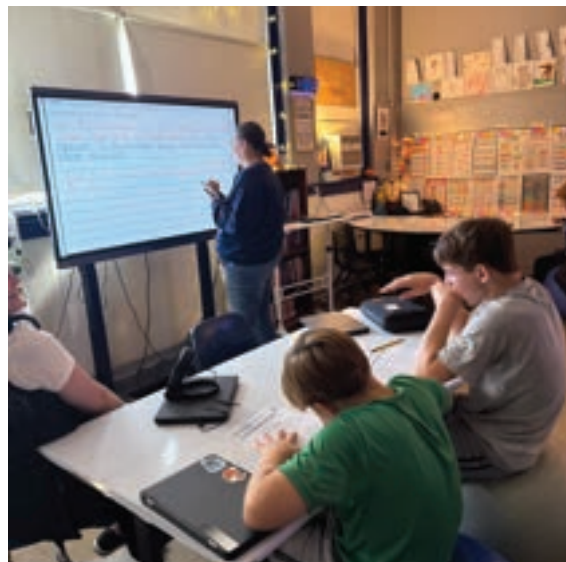
We tell kids all the time, you don’t have to be perfect. Just try to get a little better each time— and over time, that adds up!”

Sustaining Momentum

As WCMS continues to build on its success, one of the school’s major focuses this year is providing students with timely feedback for growth. Teachers are working to ensure students have mastered essential skills before moving on, using real-time responses and adjustments to guide learning.

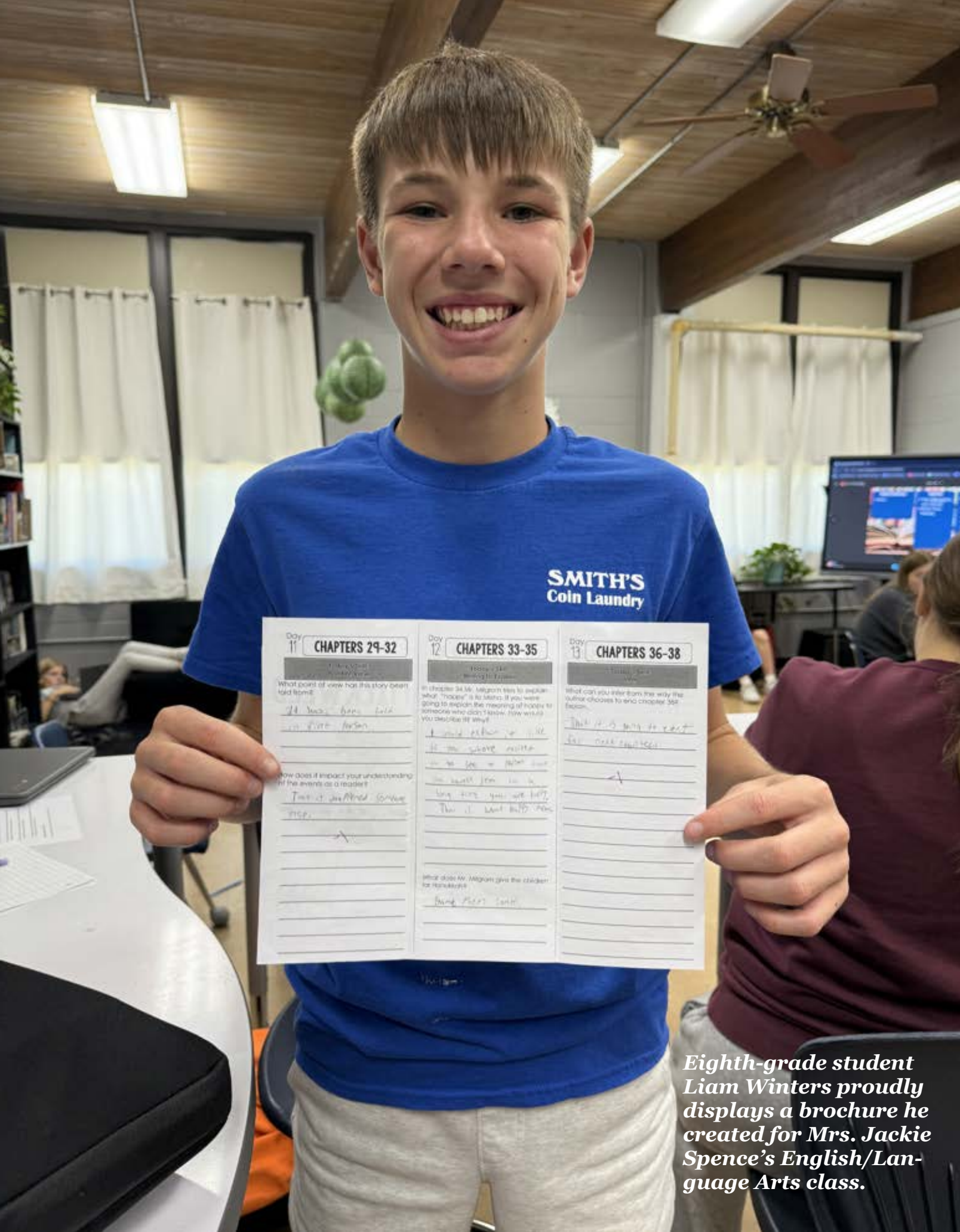
Professional development also plays a key role. The staff, described by DeWeese as “very skilled and reflective by nature,” are receiving continued training in high-impact teaching strategies designed to maintain and extend student achievement gains.

Above all, DeWeese credits teamwork and celebration as key ingredients in WCMS’s ongoing success. “We’ve found the right levers to pull— now we just need to keep the consistency in place,” she said. “Celebrating small wins along the way and continuing to reinforce teamwork is a big part of that.”



Ms. Payton Clark teaching sixth-grade students the elements of an effective paragraph.





Day 11	Day 12	Day 13
CHAPTERS 29-32	CHAPTERS 33-35	CHAPTERS 36-38
What point of view has this story been told from? <u>1st Mac, Mrs. told</u> <u>in first person</u>	In chapter 34 Mr. Melgram tries to explain what "happy" is to Maria. If you were going to explain the meaning of happy to someone who didn't know, how would you describe it? Why? <u>I would explain to her</u> <u>if she gave Maria</u> <u>to be free to be her own</u> <u>in school from in a</u> <u>big time you are left</u> <u>then it was built when</u>	What can you infer from the way the author chooses to end chapter 38? <u>That it's going to end</u> <u>for real reasons</u>
How does it impact your understanding of the events as a reader? <u>That it was a good</u> <u>idea</u>	What does Mr. Melgram give the children for Hanukkah? <u>Being their own</u>	

Eighth-grade student Liam Winters proudly displays a brochure he created for Mrs. Jackie Spence's English/Language Arts class.

Beyond the Bell:

Elementary Enrichment Program Inspires Young Minds

At West Central Elementary School, learning doesn't stop when the final bell rings. Each week, a select group of fourth and fifth-grade students stay after school to participate in the Enrichment Program – a special opportunity designed for academically talented students to explore their interests, challenge their thinking, and have fun doing it.

Elementary Principal Mrs. Lafary explained that in the School Improvement Plan (SIP) document, the program, which began in 2006, “provides an appropriate program of enrichment focused on the integration of technology in multi-disciplinary units of study, the development of individual student interests, growth in higher-level thinking skills, and the provision of an opportunity for interaction with other talented children in the district.”

Each year, around twenty students are invited to participate based on their MAP testing scores. Those who score in the top percentiles receive a letter home, giving parents the option to enroll their child in the program. For many students, receiving that letter is an exciting accomplishment – proof that their hard work and curiosity are recognized.

A Program That Makes Learning Come Alive

The Enrichment Program meets one afternoon each week, offering experiences that stretch students' minds beyond the regular classroom. Activities often combine science, technology, creativity, and problem-solving. Last year, students experimented in a myriad of fun projects, including coding and binary codes, creating potato clocks, studying gems and geodes, building bird nests, working with Sphero robots, designing paper butterflies that camouflaged into a background of their choice, completing a mathematical murder mystery, baking cake pops, and even wrapping up the year with a bowling celebration!

The program's variety and emphasis on hands-on learning are exactly what students love most. Fifth grader Reid Guile said one of his favorite projects from last year was a puzzle-based challenge his teacher created. “I like learning about math and solving puzzles of all kinds,” Reid said. “It makes your brain work harder – normal classes are too easy, and this is more fun.” He added that the experience has improved his teamwork skills and made him proud to follow in his older brother's footsteps, who also participated in the program.

Learning Beyond the Ordinary

For many students, Enrichment offers a space where learning feels different – more creative, more interactive, and, most importantly, more personal.

Kyler Bailey said he especially loved the coding project where students built simple games on an app. “I just got into it, and everything was just going well for it,” he said. That project sparked a new interest in technology for him, and he thinks he may design his own video game in the future.

Meanwhile, Greyson Lenz said his favorite experience was the end-of-year bowling field trip. “It was fun to play with friends and grow bonds with them,” he said. Before joining Enrichment, he thought school was boring – but that changed quickly:

“After I started the Enrichment Program, I learned that work can be fun too.”



Pictured: Greyson Lenz

Creativity, Confidence, and Connection

While many projects focus on science and problem-solving, the program also encourages creativity and teamwork. Elane Harden enjoyed the hidden butterfly art project, proudly saying with a smile, “I put mine on Ms. Fox's doorway.” She hopes to undertake that project again this year and loves that Enrichment allows her to express her creative side. “It puts me in a better mood,” she said, adding that she's gotten better at teamwork and enjoys getting to know students in other grades.

Hailey Thompson agreed that the program brings balance and excitement to her week. “It's something fun to do after school,” she said. “I play sports, so it activates my mind and takes my mind off of school and sports – it's something else to think about.”





Top Row (L:R) Myah Wallace, Kyler Bailey, Olive Harden, Elane Harden, Greyson Lenz.
Bottom Row (L:R) AnnaBella Torrance, Reid Guile, Hailey Thompson, Landon Joseph.

“I play sports, so it activates my mind and takes my mind off of school and sports – it’s something else to think about.”



Pictured: Hailey Thompson

Olive Harden also expressed her enjoyment of creating butterflies, with special recognition for baking cake pops with her classmates. “It’s like school but in a fun way,” she said. “It’s more activities to figure out rather than lessons.” When asked how she felt about being able to participate in the program, she answered that “Not all kids get to do it, so it makes me feel [more confident].”

Hands-on projects like Landon Joseph’s favorite small robot experiment have left lasting impressions, too. Using copper and zinc plates, sand, and water, students created tiny batteries to power their robots. “Some didn’t work, but some did – I think mine did, and I still have it,” Landon said proudly. “[The program] makes me feel special and makes me feel like I actually earned something.”

A Community of Learners

For students like AnnaBella Torrance, the best part of Enrichment is the sense of belonging. “The program makes me more excited for the end of the school day,” she said. “It’s just a really fun program,” she added, saying that her favorite day was the bowling trip at the end of the year, when, even though she didn’t win, she still enjoyed the friendly competition between peers.

Now, as a new group of fourth graders joins the program this fall, the returning fifth graders can’t wait to dive into another year of hands-on exploration. Whether they’re coding, experimenting, or creating art, one thing is clear – the Enrichment Program does more than teach; it inspires, excites, and instills a love for learning in the students.

West Central Middle School Student Spotlights

Tyler Ricketts

8th Grade



Tyler Ricketts is recognized for his positivity, teamwork, and ability to bring out the best in others. His teachers and administrators describe him as “a role model... who makes a conscious effort to be an example that everyone can look up to. He takes time to get to know those around him and brightens their day... He truly understands the impact that his actions have on those around him and works hard to create a positive influence through his sense of humor and positive mindset. He relentlessly pursues improvement and never gives up! He has a passion for athletics and stays calm and composed, even in the most stressful situations. He puts others ahead of himself and is an awesome friend and teammate.”

Tyler’s favorite part of West Central is the sense of unity across the district. “We all work as a team,” he said. “We believe in each other and what we do.” That spirit shines through in everything he does, particularly in sports like baseball, basketball, football, and track.

Even when competition gets tough, Tyler stays calm under pressure. “I like having pressure and big moments,” he said. “You just gotta take a couple deep breaths and focus on what you’re doing.” He continues that even when he may not have had a personal best game, his teammates might have – and he tries to celebrate those victories for them, as well as the team’s overall win.

Tyler looks up to basketball legend Kobe Bryant, admiring his confidence and composure in stressful situations. Like his idol, Tyler knows that true greatness isn’t just about personal victories – it’s about lifting others up and celebrating as a team. His positive mindset and steady leadership make him a standout example of West Central pride.

Gabrielle Deverell

8th Grade



Gabrielle “Gabby” Deverell lights up West Central Middle School with her kindness, positivity, and dedication. Her teachers describe her as someone who “exudes warmth and kindness in every interaction she has. If she sees someone sitting alone, she goes out of her way to include them. She is a friend to all. She graciously accepts feedback from her teachers and coaches and uses it to improve to become the best version of herself. She sets an example for others to look up to, and she makes our school a brighter place. She brings determination and perseverance to both academic tasks and athletic events – always working hard and showing up as the best version of herself.”

Gabby loves the close-knit community of West Central. “All three schools are very close with one another,” she said. That unity is part of what keeps her spreading kindness. “It’s pointless to be rude,” she explains. Her friends, family, and sports make her happy, as she says with a smile, “and I want to share that.”

To her, a good friend is “somebody who puts others over themselves and will always back up their friends.” She admires Miss Lox, a teacher and mentor who is “the type of friend [she] wants to be” – open, supportive, and always willing to help others.

Gabby’s compassion and determination reflect the values West Central strives to nurture in every student. Her ability to lift others up and continually improve herself makes her not only a standout student but also a shining example of what makes West Central such a special place to learn and grow.

JoShawn Kimbrough

8th Grade



Quiet confidence and consistent excellence define JoShawn Kimbrough, who leads by example. Teachers and administrators describe him as “patient, polite, kind, and courteous.” He is hardworking and respects those around him. “Others look up to JoShawn because he brings a quiet, calm presence. He is a leader in the classroom and sets a great example for others by putting in 100% effort in everything he does. JoShawn always looks for opportunities to help others around him.” His calm, steady presence sets the tone for his peers and inspires those around him to give their best as well.

JoShawn says his favorite part of West Central is the welcoming atmosphere and his fellow students. Competitive by nature, he’s motivated by the drive to improve and “stay on a roll.” That mindset fuels his success both in and out of the classroom. “Nose to the grindstone,” he says, a testament to his humble and grounded personality.

His teachers note that JoShawn “never expects recognition or has any expectations for others to return the favor. He acts from a place of character and integrity simply because he knows it’s the right thing to do.” He credits Coach Santos as a key influence in his life, describing him as “motivational and competitive” and someone whose attitude keeps him going.

JoShawn’s quiet determination and genuine character speak louder than words. He’s the kind of student whose steady example reminds everyone that true leadership comes from effort, humility, and lifting others up.

Wyatt Goff

8th Grade



At West Central Middle School, Wyatt Goff stands out as a natural leader – one who leads with confidence and kindness. Principal Brittney DeWeese and the middle school administration describe Wyatt as someone who “embodies a growth mindset – always striving to be better than he was the day before. He sees mistakes as opportunities to grow and improve, and faces challenges head-on. He’s the type of kid that takes time to ask people how their day is going and truly gets to know everyone around him, from his teachers to his classmates.”

Wyatt says his favorite part of West Central is his friends, and it’s easy to see why – he’s the kind of student who makes sure others feel seen and supported. “I like to make sure their day is going right,” he explained. He does this by “[trying] to join in on what they’re doing or make them laugh.”

Whether in the classroom or on the basketball, baseball, or track teams, Wyatt faces challenges head-on and views mistakes as chances to learn. This year, Wyatt has worked hard to improve his State Testing performance, experimenting with new study habits and dedicating extra time at home to master assignments and memorization. It’s that quiet determination and focus on growth that make him a role model to his peers. He credits his parents as his biggest influences, joking how they’re “always right” and guide him with wisdom and patience.

Wyatt’s leadership, work ethic, and compassion reflect the heart of West Central’s mission – helping students build both character and confidence as they grow into thoughtful, well-rounded young adults.

Student Council: Building Tomorrow's Leaders at WCHS

Few organizations truly embody the spirit of the student body better than the Student Council, a dedicated group of students who work year-round to represent their peers, coordinate major school events, and learn what it truly means to lead with purpose and collaboration.

Guided by sponsors Mr. Adam Boyle, who teaches High School Social Studies, and Mrs. Tiffany Ouellette, District Librarian and High School Social Media Teacher, the Student Council serves as the voice of the student body. Meeting every other Tuesday, the group serves as an outlet for students to share concerns, propose ideas, and contribute to shaping the school's culture and climate. According to Mr. Boyle, the council's mission is simple: to empower students to step into leadership roles and advocate for their classmates. Boyle, Ouellette, and other teachers also serve as an advisory board for the students, giving feedback and advice when students present them with a problem or scenario they would like guidance on.

Developing Leadership Through Service

Boyle knows the value of strong leadership firsthand. "Leadership isn't about just doing everything yourself," Boyle said. Too often, he shared, students think they have to do everything themselves, but much of leadership involves building up others to lead a team that can collectively reach the end goal. His goal as Student Council sponsor is to teach students that effective leadership comes from teamwork, communication, and confidence—skills that extend far beyond the classroom.

Through their work, council members develop skills in organization, delegation, and problem-solving, preparing them for college, careers, and community involvement. "We want to find more kids who will be great leaders and encourage them, help them grow, so they can be successful leaders even after they leave this school," Boyle explained.

Advocates and Event Planners

Student Council members wear many hats throughout the school year. They act as representatives for their classes and the larger student body, bringing issues and ideas directly to the administration. Beyond advocacy, they are also the creative force behind some of West Central's biggest events.

The council plays a central role in planning and decorating for Homecoming, bringing together students from all grade levels to celebrate school spirit. They also coordinate Blood Drives in partnership with the Red Cross, handling check-ins, refreshments, and hospitality on the day of the event. Boyle and Ouellette help coordinate with the Red Cross in advance, but the students take the reins during the event itself.

Building Community, Building Confidence

The structure of the Student Council ensures that leadership opportunities are available at every grade level. Each class, from freshman to senior, elects its own representatives, while the school as a whole votes on the higher officers. Typically, there are about twenty-eight to thirty members total when combining the freshmen, sophomore, and junior representatives, along with the senior representatives—of which officer positions are chosen.

This democratic process helps students learn about responsibility and representation from an early age. It also ensures that each grade has a voice in school decisions and event planning. Students interested in joining must meet specific grade qualifications, but above all, Boyle looks for passion, initiative, and a willingness to serve others.

A Legacy of Leadership

Boyle's connection to Student Council is years in the making. As a former member himself, he understands both the challenges and the rewards of serving in such a role. He took over the mentorship of the club from teachers who had taught him, and today, some of the teachers who help advise the council are former students of his—evidence of the long-lasting impact of leadership training at West Central.

As the next generation continues to age into their roles, Boyle continues to see the Student Council as a vital part of nurturing the next generation of leaders, encouraging them to be active participants in their community.





The 2024-2025 Student Council at last years Red Cross blood drive.

Article VI: Duties of the Officers

Section 1: The duties of the President of the Council shall be: to preside over all meetings of the council, to appoint all committees deemed necessary, and to call special meetings of the Council when they are required.

Section 2: The duties of the vice president shall be: to presume power of the President in the absence or incapacitation of the latter. The vice president shall succeed to the presidency in case of suspension, expulsion, or the resignation of the president. The Council must vote on and approve the succession.

Section 3: The duties of the secretary shall be to keep an accurate record of all meetings and representative attendance, to attend all correspondence of the Council, and to report the minutes of the last meeting and post in the designated location.

Section 4: The duties of the treasurer shall be to keep a record of expenditures and receipts, to submit a financial report at each meeting, and to assure that all claims for payment are accurately paid and submitted.

Section 5: The duties of the Historian are to keep an active photo and written record of all activities and special events sponsored or coordinated by the Student Council and share this material with interested parties (ex. Year-book, Social Media, the District Website, Local Newspapers, etc.)

2025 - 2026 Student Council Officers

President- Drake Vancil
Vice President- Grace Seitz
Secretary- Delaney Endress
Treasurer- Eric Carlson Jr
Historian- Teegan Rodeffer

Seniors

Drake Vancil, Grace Seitz, Delaney Endress, Eric Carlson Jr, Teegan Rodeffer, Jackson Spence, Lainey Klossing, Addison Webster, Autumn Rankin.

Juniors

Colten Decrane, Katelyn Ford, Rebecca Hinshaw, Dustie Liggett, Kaylee Mills, Alivia Price, Addison Burrell, Payton Eissnicher.

Sophomores

Irelynn Boyle, Lillian Higgins, Lia Klossing, Paige Loper, Brenley Priesman, Mason Schaley, Izzy Koch.

Freshman

Isia Rodeffer, Brady Lenahan, Macee McConnell, Mariah Wood, Addy McSparen, Claire Myers.

Postmarked with Love: The Little Class with a Big Goal



Sometimes the best ideas come when you least expect them.

For 3rd-grade teacher Mrs. Mills, the spark that became the Love Makes the World Go Round project began on a snow day last school year in January. While scrolling Facebook, she spotted a post from another school that was doing a similar project.

“It immediately caught my eye because it aligned so perfectly with our classroom’s core philosophy,” she explained.

That philosophy – Choose Kind – comes from “Wonder” by R. J. Palacio, the first book Mrs. Mills reads to her students each year. “It sets the tone for our classroom environment, leading to so many invaluable lessons on kindness, empathy, and acceptance,” she said. The idea of spreading that same kindness beyond the classroom walls felt like the perfect next step.

Launching the project near Valentine’s Day only made sense. “It was the perfect time to spread that message,” Mrs. Mills said. “I put up one post on Facebook, and it just completely took off from there.”

From One Post to Hundreds of Hearts

On January 20, Mrs. Mills shared a simple flyer on her Facebook page and to the children’s parents through SeeSaw, the class app. She hoped a few families might help them collect postcards from other states. Instead, the post spread like wildfire – it was shared 77 times in just a few days.

“For days after (sharing my initial post), my Facebook feed was just flooded with that same image. It was amazing to see how the community rallied behind the project.”

A week after the post, the office secretary appeared with a stack of envelopes. That first mail day brought 16 letters from places like Texas, Florida, Colorado, and even Hawaii. “The kids were practically buzzing with excitement,” Mrs. Mills recalled.

A new daily ritual began: whenever the mail arrived, the class stopped everything to open, read, and celebrate each note. “It became our favorite part of the day,” she said.



Abbott the Bee came all the way from Louisiana to be with Mrs. Mills’ 3rd Grade class!

A Geography Lesson Straight from the Heart

Each new envelope meant another state to color in on their classroom map– but it also meant a new connection. The project expanded quickly. Friends, relatives, and even former West Central alums joined in, helping the class reach every corner of the United States. And beyond. Soon, something amazing happened: mail started arriving from all over the world! Letters came from Japan, Indonesia, the United Kingdom, South Africa, Switzerland, Honduras, France, the Philippines, and Mexico! Some strangers even sent books, stickers, snacks, and one sent a fuzzy, purple-and-yellow stuffed bee named Abbott the Bee, who now serves as the class mascot, reminding everyone to “Bee Kind.”

In just about a month, the students received over 300 pieces of mail – and they responded to every single one. Each third grader handwrote a thank-you note, turning the lesson into a heartfelt exercise in gratitude.

Mission Complete: The 50-State Celebration

The original goal was to collect letters from all 50 states by Valentine’s Day. Snow days delayed things a bit, but on February 19 – while sorting through a final batch of 40 new envelopes – the class found it: a letter from Delaware, the very last missing state! “The room erupted in cheers,” Mrs. Mills said. “The kids were jumping, screaming, and yes – there were happy tears. Mine included.” To celebrate, parents sponsored a pizza party for the class. It was the perfect reward for weeks of excitement, teamwork, and kindness. “It was such a joyful and meaningful experience, one that connected hearts from near and far.”

Kindness That Travels

Of the hundreds of notes received, Mrs. Mills says it’s impossible to choose a favorite. “So many were incredibly meaningful,” she said. But one moment stood out: a stranger so determined to help them reach their goal spent \$31 on overnight shipping to make sure their card arrived in time. “It was a stunning example of the generosity this project inspired,” Mrs. Mills said.

A Lasting Lesson

Would she do it again? Definitely – but not every year, Mrs. Mills admitted. “Part of what made it so successful and exciting for both the students and the entire community was its uniqueness.” She wants it to feel new and special for another class someday.

The mail may have stopped arriving, but thanks to the impact of those hundreds of letters and the influence of Abbott the Bee, Mrs. Mills’ class, now in fourth grade, will always remember to “Bee Kind.”



A push for their last four remaining states!

Trash into Treasure:

Recycling Caps into a Place for Friendship

At the elementary school, Physical Education teacher and bus driver Jalyne Young is leading a project that's turning everyday plastic waste into something lasting and meaningful. Through a community-wide effort, she's collecting plastic caps to create a bench for the school's kickball area and new playground— a simple idea that's brought students, staff, and families together in a shared project.

Young said the inspiration came from a practical need and a heartfelt purpose. "I wanted a place to sit during recess and PE classes while we're watching kickball," she explained. But she also thought it would be great to have a buddy bench— a spot where students can sit if they're looking for someone to talk to or play with.

The project operates with a collection bucket placed in the front hallway. "Students bring in their caps and leave them in the bucket for me to collect," Young said. "Staff and community members do the same— community members either collect them and give them to their students who are family members or someone who works at the school." Teachers have even found creative ways to encourage participation with heat points and PBIS family challenge rewards to motivate students.



The process of turning those caps into a bench is far more detailed than it might seem. Only certain types of plastic— those labeled with recycle numbers 2, 4, or 5— can be used. "They must be cleaned," Young said. They are able to collect caps from items like water bottles, Gatorade, applesauce pouches, milk jugs, and food containers like cottage cheese and ice cream lids. Once collected, the lids are carefully sorted— now with help from the High School National Honor Society students. "We have to sort and make sure our lids are great for the company that we take them to so we don't get denied and sent back with our caps." In total, 450lbs of caps are needed to send off to Green Tree Plastic ABC Partnership for the two benches, 150lbs of which have already been collected.



Beyond the environmental benefit, Young hopes the project will show students and community members how small actions can make a big difference and that West Central school is already a great place to be.

"They will see how even something so little can be made into something else rather than just being thrown away."

And there's no plan to stop there. "My plan is once we get the first two benches to keep it going," as the company making the bench offers many other recycled products.

The benches are expected to be completed and installed by summer 2026 near the kickball area where students and teachers often gather. As the project continues, Young hopes the simple act of collecting plastic caps will remind everyone how small contributions can add up to something lasting— both for the environment and for the community that made it possible.



Example bench from Green Tree Plastic ABC Partnership



Physical Education teacher and bus driver Jalyne Young holding recently collected plastic caps.

Playing It Forward:

How Music Connects Students and Neighbors

At West Central, music is a daily practice and a source of joy for students. In a time when schools across the country are cutting arts programs to save money, West Central stands out for continuing to invest in its music department— and even finding new ways to grow it.

According to the Arts Education Data Project, approximately 92 percent of public school students in the U.S. have access to music classes; however, this still leaves more than 3.6 million students without the opportunity to take one. And in many rural areas, music programs are smaller or underfunded compared to those in larger districts. That makes it especially meaningful that West Central continues to offer both band and choir, ensuring that every student who wants to participate in music has the opportunity. (Arts Education Data Project)

A Program That Reaches Everyone

Nannen teaches fifth through eighth-grade band, high school band, and choir, while also assisting with school plays and after-school programs. She came to the district three years ago and has since made it her home— both in the classroom and in the community.

“We provide an opportunity to kids who wouldn’t otherwise have the chance to be part of something like this,” she said. That opportunity shows up everywhere: from pep bands at football and basketball games to choir performances at the Veterans Day program, the community Christmas Walk, and even local funerals and weddings. Students are also involved in nursing-home performances and other community events throughout the year.

Building Skills and Confidence

Participating in music does more than teach rhythm and pitch. It fosters teamwork, discipline, and emotional expression— skills that benefit students for a lifetime. According to a 2019 study by the University of British Columbia, students involved in band, choir, or orchestra scored significantly higher in math, science, and English than their peers who did not take music, even when researchers controlled for socioeconomic factors and prior academic performance. In other words, making music makes minds sharper.

Ms. Nannen sees that transformation every day. When kids perform at solo and ensemble contests, especially at the middle-school level, “it’s a turning point,” she said. “When they get praise and are told they’re actually good at it, you can see them light up.” That encourages continued participation and excitement. Even for those who may not be as naturally gifted, constructive criticism helps them learn and grow right alongside their peers, fostering an environment of mutual and continual growth.

That confidence often leads to increased participation, stronger teamwork, and a willingness to take on challenges— in music and beyond. One high-school choir student even joked, “I’d need a therapist if I didn’t have music,” before adding that choir helps them de-stress and feel connected to their peers.

Music That Gives Back

For West Central’s students, performing is also a way to give back and participate in the community. The department regularly shares its talents with the community, from performances at local nursing homes to showcase their talents and share joy, to spreading Christmas cheer at the community Christmas Walk. These events showcase

the students’ hard work while reminding everyone of the joy music brings to the district.

Looking ahead, Ms. Nannen hopes to see even more community involvement. She’s hoping to offer a spring production that could be either a musical or a talent show, and she encourages local organizers to think of the school’s musicians when planning parades, festivals, or civic celebrations.

She also leads the Music Makers through the 21st Century Club, which gives students extra time to explore their talents after school. Many of them also have private lessons with Ms. Nannen because they want to grow and flourish in what they enjoy.

Harmony Beyond the Classroom

Music at West Central does more than fill the halls with sound. With every performance, from the high school band under the lights at Friday night games to the choir at local events, it strengthens the bond between the school and the community.

As Ms. Nannen puts it, her hope for the students is simple: “That music always lives in them— whether they play, sing, or just appreciate it. I hope they carry that on throughout their lives.”

For a district like West Central, that’s something worth celebrating.



Lily Bailey at Senior Night, October 2025



Ms. Nannen with the Fall 2025 Choir Class



Addison Webster at Senior Night, October 2025



Drake Vancil at Senior Night, October 2025

Sisters Behind the Wheel:

The Women Who Keep West Central Moving

For most, the school day begins when the first bell rings. But for sisters Jackie and Joyce, it begins long before that – warming up engines, checking mirrors, and preparing to safely carry dozens of students who depend on them. Between them, they share more than 70 years of driving experience, a lifetime of early mornings, laughter, and lessons learned behind the wheel.

Joyce first began driving nearly twenty-five years ago, inspired by her brother-in-law, Rick Olson, former Head of Transportation, and her natural love of people. “I love the kids – they share their lives with me,” she said. “The kids keep me coming back year after year.”

Jackie began her own driving journey in 1979 and is now in her 47th year on the road – and her 44th at West Central. Jackie can’t imagine doing anything else. “I almost retired once,” she admitted, “but I knew the kids were going to miss me. I look forward to seeing them every fall.”

The two sisters have worked side by side at West Central for twenty years, forming a team built on family ties and a shared devotion to the students they serve. While the job has changed over the decades, one thing remains the same: the joy they find in their riders. From handmade cards and cheerful greetings to hugs from graduating seniors, the small moments add up to a lifetime of meaning. What makes their story even more special is how many generations they’ve served. Both Jackie and Joyce now drive for the children of parents they once transported years ago – a full-circle connection that fills their routes with nostalgia and pride.

But being a bus driver isn’t all sunshine and smiles. As Jackie says, “It’s not an easy job, and it’s not for the faint of heart.” Every morning and afternoon, she and Joyce are the only adults on a bus filled with 60 to 70 children, navigating country roads while keeping watchful eyes on the rearview mirror. “You can’t just hand them off to another teacher,” Jackie explains. “You’re it – until you get there.”

“I love the kids– they share their lives with me,” she said. “The kids keep me coming back year after year.”

Still, their compassion never wavers. They see beyond behavior to the heart of every child. “[The parents] send us the best they have,” Jackie says as she recalls advice from former superintendent Ralph Grimm. “No kid is at fault for how they are,” she continues, “They’re just kids.” It’s a philosophy that has carried both sisters through decades of service and shaped the culture on their buses – one of respect, safety, and unconditional care. “We don’t let bullying fly,” Jackie said firmly.

Having grown up and built their lives in the area, both women take pride in being part of the same community that raised them. Joyce, originally from Warren County, says she’s come to love the unique “way of living by the river” of Henderson County – its people, traditions, and celebrations. Jackie, from LaHarpe, feels much the same. “It’s special,” she says, “seeing kids grow up – and then driving their kids years later.”

As West Central looks for new drivers, Superintendent Stacey Day hopes others will join them. The job requires patience, strength, and heart – but for the right person, it’s one of the most rewarding ways to serve your community. Jackie shared that the job relies heavily on the administration and that the staff, including Superintendent Stacey Day, are wonderful to work with. Her advice to those considering driving: “If you love kids,” she says with a laugh, “you’ll make it through.”

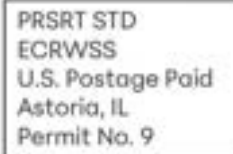




Sisters Jackie Olson (L) & Joyce Bass (R) standing in front of Jackie's Bus.



West Central School District
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West Central C.U.S.D. #235

Providing Opportunity. Expecting Excellence

Our Story. Our Strength. Our Future.

At West Central Schools, every classroom, every hallway, and every event is part of a larger journey— one made stronger by a community that cares. With your support, we're opening doors to opportunity and holding fast to excellence. Thank you for believing in our students, celebrating our achievements, and standing beside us as we move forward together.



Stacey Day.....Superintendent of West Central C.U.S.D. #235
Jason Kirby.....West Central High School Principal
Stacey Kreps.....West Central High School Assistant Principal
Brittney DeWeese.....West Central Middle School Principal
Byron Helt.....West Central Middle School Assistant Principal
Kathy Lafary.....West Central Elementary School Principal
Bryan Taylor.....West Central Elementary School Assistant Principal

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