

WE ARE
**WOOD
RIVER**



**WOOD RIVER
RURAL SCHOOLS**

**2024-2025
ANNUAL REPORT**

WOOD RIVER COMMUNITY:

There's a question I've been sitting with for a couple of years now.

It sounds simple. But the more I turned it over, the more I realized it wasn't simple at all.

WHAT DOES IT REALLY MEAN TO GRADUATE FROM WOOD RIVER?

We could answer that the easy way. A diploma means a student completed the required coursework, earned enough credits, and met the state's graduation requirements. Those things matter. They always will. But I've never believed they tell the whole story — and after two years of listening to this community, I don't think you do either.

WE STARTED BY LISTENING

Before we defined what a Wood River graduate should be, we asked the people who know Wood River best.

We surveyed our staff. We gathered input from community members. We presented to the Board of Education. We talked with students. And then we sat with what we heard until the themes became impossible to ignore.

People are proud of our students' work ethic. They value the relationships in our schools. They want graduates to have real options after high school — whatever path they choose. And they believe a Wood River diploma should represent more than academic preparation. It should represent a person who shows up, contributes, leads in their own way, and is ready to be part of something larger than themselves.

That wasn't a surprise. Those things describe what Wood River has always valued. What we didn't have was a shared definition — something written down, agreed upon, and built into the way we operate. This process gave us that.

But make no mistake: we didn't create these values. We found them here. You put them there.

Our staff deserves enormous credit for what you'll see in this report. They gave honest input, pushed back on ideas that needed pushing, and committed to a framework that asks more of everyone — including themselves. The culture they've built in our buildings is what made this work possible. You'll read about that culture in the pages that follow — in teachers who didn't just learn about leadership but modeled it, and in students who didn't wait to be asked before they started leading.

WHAT WE BUILT

The graduate profile is organized around three pillars: Academic, Culture, and Leadership.

The Academic pillar is about preparation and options. We want Wood River graduates to be ready

for whatever comes next — college, trade school, military, or the workforce. That means completing coursework and exceeding our minimum credit requirements, but it also means leaving here with something that opens a door. A semester's worth of college credits. An industry certification. A strong ACT score. A verified work experience. We've built in multiple pathways because our students' futures don't all look the same — and they shouldn't have to.

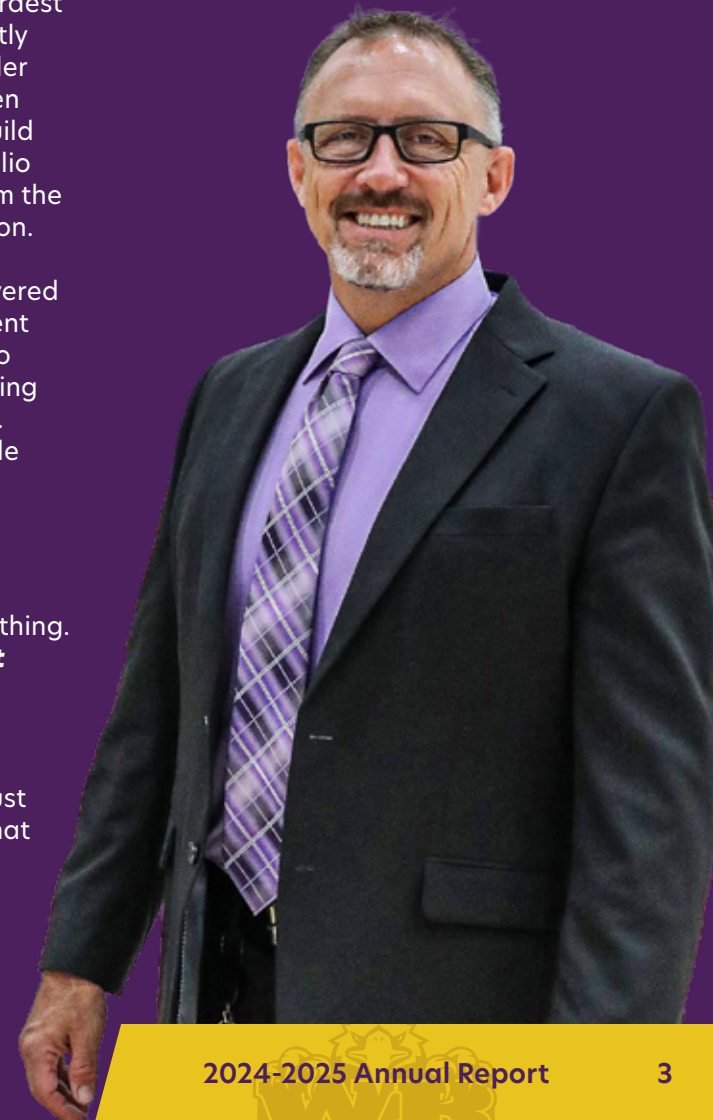
The Culture pillar is about showing up — literally and figuratively. We expect 95% attendance because dependability is a skill, and the world notices when it's missing. We ask students to participate in at least two activities per year because belonging to something teaches things a classroom can't. And we're requiring 40 hours of community service during high school because we want our graduates to understand their role in this community before they leave it.

The Leadership pillar is the hardest to define and the most distinctly Wood River. Through our Leader in Me framework and the Seven Habits curriculum, students build a multi-year leadership portfolio documenting their growth from the time they arrive until graduation. That portfolio culminates in a capstone presentation — delivered to a community panel. A student standing in front of adults who know this community, accounting for the leader they've become. That moment is what this whole framework is working toward.

THE FLOOR, NOT THE CEILING

I want to be clear about something. **These benchmarks represent a minimum — a floor, not a finish line.**

Wood River has never been a place that celebrated doing just enough. Our students earn what they get. That's something this community told us, loudly and consistently, and it's something I believe about



every kid who walks through our doors.

So while we've set expectations every graduate will be held to, we're also building a recognition framework for students who go further. More college credits. Higher test scores. Additional certifications. Deeper community involvement. More hours of service. Students who exceed these expectations in meaningful ways will be recognized for it — because that's the Wood River way. **Work hard. Build Community. Lead the way.**

The full recognition framework is still being developed, and it will grow alongside this profile. But the intent is clear: raise the floor, and trust our students to break through their own ceilings.

WHAT YOU'LL SEE IN THESE PAGES

The work described in this report isn't theoretical. It's already happening.

Our middle and high school recently earned Leader in Me Lighthouse status — a recognition that reflects years of staff commitment to building a culture where every student is seen as a leader. The teachers and staff who earned that distinction didn't do it by following a program. They did it by believing in something and living it out loud. That's the culture this graduate profile was built to sustain and extend.

You'll also read about a group of FFA students who didn't wait for permission to do something significant. They proposed an idea, spent two years developing it, and launched a multi-state cattle show that exceeded every expectation — organized, run, and owned by students. That event will grow. Future Wood River students will gain experiences from it, compete because of it, and build on what this group started. That's not a club fundraiser. That's the graduate profile in action.

These stories aren't coincidences. They're evidence.

A LIVING DOCUMENT

This framework will continue to evolve. Benchmarks will be refined. Systems will be built. Some things will work better than others and we'll adjust. That's as it should be.

What won't change is the foundation — because the community laid it. You told us what a Wood River graduate should be. We listened, we organized it, and we're committing to deliver it.

A Wood River diploma will mean something specific. Something earned. Something this community can point to and say — that's one of ours.

I'm grateful to every staff member, board member, parent, student, and community member who contributed to this work. This belongs to all of you.

This is Wood River.

Sincerely,

TERRY ZEISSIN
SUPERINTENDENT,
WOOD RIVER RURAL SCHOOLS



VISION

(Where we are going)

**WORK HARD.
BUILD COMMUNITY.
LEAD THE WAY!**

Each Wood River student works hard to meet high academic standards, earn opportunities in life, and become contributing members of their community.



MISSION

(What we do every day to get there)

**ALWAYS REACHING
FOR EXCELLENCE!**

Students working hard and leading in their own way.
Staff positively impacting student journeys.



**CORE
VALUES**

(The foundation of the district)

**SUPPORT | CARE
RESPECT | LEAD**

The Wood River Rural Schools district provides an environment for students and staff based on Support, Care, Respect and Lead, and will be held accountable for maintaining these standards.

GRADUATE PROFILE

WORK HARD. BUILD COMMUNITY. LEAD THE WAY.

WHAT A WOOD RIVER DIPLOMA MEANS

Wood River graduates are driven academically, contribute positively to their community and culture, and lead in their own way.



ACADEMIC

PREPARED FOR WHAT'S NEXT

Each Wood River graduate is prepared for their next step after high school. Students demonstrate responsibility, critical thinking, and goal setting. They learn from mistakes, overcome challenges, and follow through on commitments.

BENCHMARKS

- Complete all required coursework and exceed minimum credit requirements (260 credits)
- Plus at least one of the following:
 - » Earn 12 college credits through dual enrollment
 - » Score 20 or higher on the ACT (each subtest)
 - » Score 60 or higher on the ASVAB
 - » Earn at least one industry certification
 - » Earn the Seal of Biliiteracy
 - » Complete a verified work-based learning experience

CULTURE

READY TO CONTRIBUTE

Each Wood River graduate understands the importance of community. They show up, work hard, and contribute to something larger than themselves. Students collaborate, build relationships, and take pride in their school and community.

BENCHMARKS

- Maintain 95% attendance throughout high school
- Participate in 2+ school activities, organizations, or teams per year
- Complete 40 hours of community service during high school

These benchmarks represent the floor – the minimum expectation for every Wood River graduate. Students are encouraged to exceed them in every way possible.

LEADERSHIP

LEADING IN THEIR OWN WAY

Each Wood River graduate understands how they lead. Students develop confidence, resilience, and problem-solving skills. Through the Leader in Me framework and Seven Habits curriculum, students learn their leadership strengths and how to positively influence others.

BENCHMARKS

- Maintain a multi-year leadership portfolio documenting growth
- Complete a leadership capstone presentation to a community panel
- Complete Seven Habits training through Leader in Me



WOOD RIVER'S MIDDLE
AND HIGH SCHOOL EARNS
LIGHTHOUSE STATUS

ALREADY LEADING



A year ago, Wood River educators traveled to a Leader in Me symposium to watch other schools present their work and wonder what was possible.

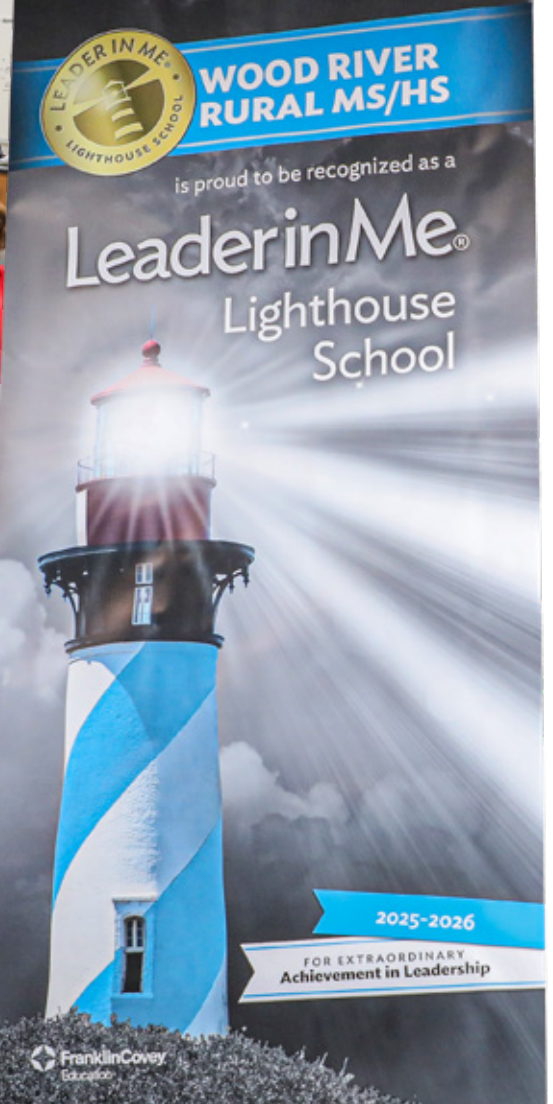
This year, they were the ones at the front of the room.

After earning Leader in Me Lighthouse status — the same recognition Wood River Elementary achieved the year before — middle and high school staff traveled to Dallas to present alongside schools from across the country. The shift wasn't lost on anyone who made the trip.

"I remember feeling in awe of what 'could be,'" said middle school English teacher Madeline Smith. "Now we were the ones presenting, answering questions, having people ask us for our resources. It was a testament to the hard work our district has put in."

That work didn't start with a reinvention. After visiting Lighthouse schools in Iowa, staff realized much of what they needed was already in place.

"We only needed to focus on a few key areas," said Lacey Woody, teacher and Leader in Me coordinator. "Wood River already had many strong practices. We may have been closer than we thought."





What followed was a deliberate push toward building-wide alignment. Every student and staff member joined an action team – Academic, Culture, or Leadership – with real projects and real accountability. Staff applied the same 4 Disciplines of Execution framework they were teaching students to their own Lighthouse pursuit.

"Intentional focus toward a goal," said guidance counselor Matt Cantrell. "Being told we were close gave us the momentum to push things across the finish line."

Buy-in made the difference. When early wins became visible –



murals painted, visitor bleachers approved, student proposals turned into real changes – momentum built on itself.

"The celebration of success was a huge boost," said social studies teacher Grant Johnson. **"Students saw that their hard work was making a difference.** We saw a culture shift from going through the motions to active participation."

That shift is now visible to anyone who walks through the building. Visitors have been caught off guard when students approach them, extend a hand, and introduce themselves. Students lead assemblies, announcements, pep rallies, and the Academic Renaissance celebration. In middle school, students now teach weekly Leader in Me lessons to their peers.



"Student voice is strong here," Smith said, "because we take what students say seriously – and students see evidence that their voice matters."

In Dallas, the Wood River team also sat down with Leader in Me co-author Sean Covey, sharing feedback directly with the organization's leadership.

"The fact that the CEO of a global company was there, talking to a

handful of educators, about his program – it shows this program works because of its heart," Smith said.

For Cantrell, Lighthouse status itself is less about the recognition than what it reflects.

"It doesn't change what we do," he said. "It just means someone else is seeing it and agrees we're doing the right things."



Looking ahead, staff expect the work to keep growing – deeper student ownership, stronger curriculum, and an expanding Parent Lighthouse team focused on bringing families further into the culture they've helped build.

The system, Smith says, is designed to last.

"We've purposely built accountability so no one is left on an island. No matter who comes in – staff or students – the expectation is that everyone contributes." 

BUILT TO LAST

WOOD RIVER FFA STUDENTS DIDN'T JUST PLAN AN EVENT; THEY BUILT SOMETHING THE NEXT GENERATION WILL GROW



The idea started simply enough.

Wood River FFA members were tired of selling fruit and popcorn to the same people every year. They wanted something more meaningful — a fundraiser where they could build real skills and take real ownership. Since many members were already involved in the cattle industry, the conversation turned to hosting a youth cattle show.

What followed was anything but simple.

It took nearly two years of planning before the idea reached the school board. Once approved, students built the Fall Island Showdown from scratch — forming committees for sponsorships, branding,

registration, budget, awards, and social media. Some had never attended a cattle show before they started organizing one. Others had never made a cold call before they were introducing themselves to sponsors and following up professionally.

Senior Madden Brabec helped propose the idea and stayed involved through every phase — budget committee, setup, and teardown.

"We learned teamwork and leadership, planning and execution, and how to build connections with people," Brabec said.

The first-year event drew approximately 200 exhibitors

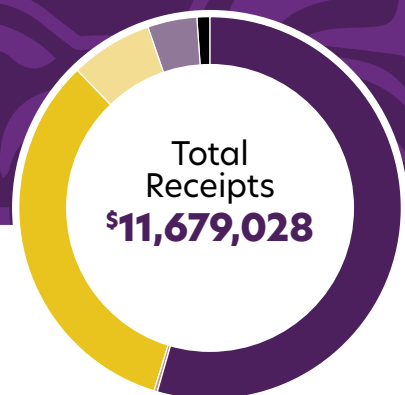
from five states — double what organizers had hoped for. Feedback centered on something rare for a debut event: professionalism. Every sponsor call, every logistical decision, every moment on show day was student-owned.

What makes this more than a good story is what it sets in motion. The chapter now has a sustainable fundraiser that funds real agricultural experiences. Future students will compete at a show this group built. Future officers will inherit an event with a reputation and the expectation to grow it further.

For Brabec, the experience pointed somewhere specific. He heads to UNL next fall to study animal science on a pre-veterinary track — a path sharpened by exactly the kind of high-stakes, real-world work the Fall Island Showdown demanded.

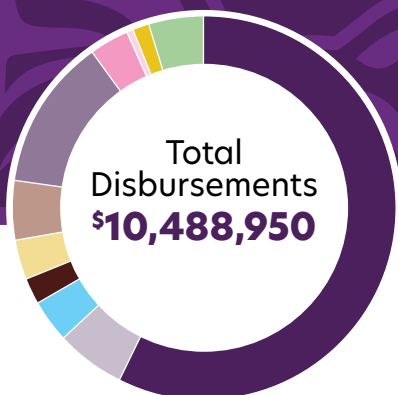


FINANCIAL RECEIPTS



Description	Receipts
Local Receipts	\$6,379,168
County Receipts	\$40,178
State Receipts other than TEEOSA	\$3,849,351
State Aid (TEEOSA)	\$794,900
Federal Receipts	\$511,614
Total Other Financing Sources	\$103,817

FINANCIAL EXPENDITURES



Description	Expenditures
All Instruction Expenditures	\$6,031,048
Support Services - Students	\$606,008
Support Services - Instruction	\$371,398
General Administration	\$230,713
Office of the Principal	\$342,575
Central Services	\$522,459
Maintenance & Operation	\$1,337,239
Support Services - Transportation	\$376,137
State Categorical Programs	\$49,371
Other	\$150,000
Total Federal Programs	\$472,002

DISTRICT CLASSIFICATIONS

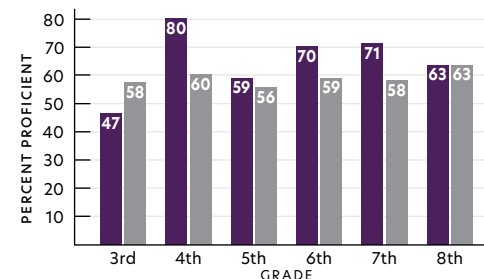
DISTRICT:
GREAT

ELEMENTARY:
GREAT

MIDDLE SCHOOL:
EXCELLENT

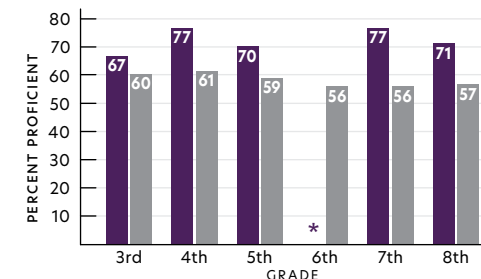
HIGH SCHOOL:
GREAT

NSCAS ELA '24-'25

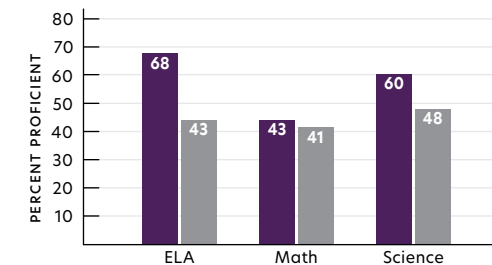


Wood River Rural Schools
Nebraska State Average
* No data available

NSCAS MATH '24-'25



11TH GRADE ACT '24-'25



DEMOGRAPHICS

Student Enrollment
467

English Learners
5%
State Avg: 10%

Free/Reduced Lunch
42%
State Avg: 50%

Special Education
15%
State Avg: 17%

Graduation Rate
100%
State Avg: 88%

College-Going Rate
68%
State Avg: 76%

Teachers FTE
48

Teachers with Masters Degree
51%
State Avg: 59%





Wood River Rural Schools
13800 West Wood River Road
Wood River, NE 68883

"This community has always believed in doing things the right way — working hard, showing up, and taking care of each other. This report reflects that. We're proud of what our students, staff, and district are building, and we're excited about where it's headed."

—CRAIG HUXTABLE

President, Wood River Rural Schools Board of Education

Craig Huxtable, President

Dylan Gill, Secretary

Jodi Rauert

Nick Rennau

Crystal Stutzman

Tyler Doane

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