



Wolverine Tracks

Fall 2025

A publication designed to keep our community informed about the exciting things happening in the West Geauga Local School District.



West Geauga is Recognized as One of Ohio's Top-Performing School Districts

The Ohio Department of Education released the 2024–2025 School Report Cards, and West Geauga Local Schools is proud to share that we **continue to rank among the very best in the state**.

West Geauga is one of only 10 districts statewide to earn an **Overall 5-Star Rating**—the highest possible score—**AND 5 stars in each of the following component categories**: Achievement, Progress, Gap Closing, Early Literacy and Graduation. **West Geauga ranked 11th (out of 607 districts)** with a Performance Index of 108.5, exceeding state standards in achievement.

Adding to this honor, **West Geauga High School ranked 2nd** among all public high schools in Ohio based on the Performance Index, a key measure of student achievement. **West Geauga Middle School ranked 8th** among all Ohio public middle schools in achievement.

This level of recognition for high-quality education benefits students by opening new opportunities for career and job training, college admission, and scholarship opportunities. High-performing schools also correlate to increased property values for our residents, and attract families and businesses to strengthen our local economy.

“We are incredibly proud of our students, staff, and community for their hard work and commitment to excellence,” said **Dr. Nancy Benincasa**, Superintendent of West Geauga Local Schools.

This recognition underscores the success of our students and the unwavering dedication of those who support them every day.

“This recognition reinforces what we already know—that West Geauga is an exceptional place for students to learn and grow,” added **Christina Sherwood**, President of the West Geauga Board of Education. “We thank our entire school community for their partnership and support in making this possible.”

We extend our deepest gratitude to our students, staff, families, and community members for making West Geauga shine! **Together, WE ARE WEST G!**

The Future is Bright



West Geauga Local Schools is incredibly proud of the Class of 2025 and all they have accomplished during their time with us. This group of students has demonstrated perseverance, leadership, and a strong commitment to excellence both inside and outside the classroom. From academic achievements and artistic creativity to athletic success and community service, the Class of 2025 has left a lasting impact on our schools and community. We celebrate not only their accomplishments, but also the character, resilience, and teamwork they have shown along the way. As they prepare to take their next steps, we are confident that they will continue to achieve great things, and we are honored to have been part of their journey.

CLASS OF 2025

West Geauga High School proudly **graduated 146 students.**

100% GRADUATION RATE

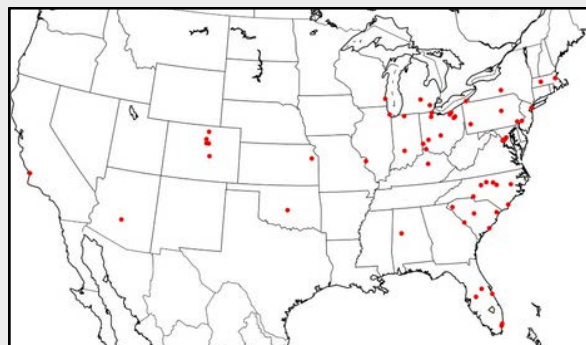
All WG class of 2025 students **completed graduation requirements** in the 4-year cohort

GRADUATE HONORS

On the basis of cumulative GPA, **34% of the class graduated with honors.**

West Geauga's Class of 2025 is heading into the future with an impressive array of opportunities. Our students earned scholarships recognizing **merit, athletics, service, and leadership**—including Governor's Merit, Presidential, and Dean's Merit Scholarships, West Geauga Education Foundation Scholarships, and University Grants. Some of these awards provide for the entire cost of the tuition.

Students in the class of 2025 were accepted to **colleges and universities** across the country. From Northeast Ohio and other in-state schools, to destinations as far as Alaska, California, Colorado, Florida, and Massachusetts—and many places in between—this year's map showcases the exciting journeys for our graduates.



Celebrating the Class of 2025

The Class of 2025 began a **new tradition** on their last day of high school, traveling through the district for a clap out at each building. It was a meaningful farewell, giving seniors the chance to revisit the schools and teachers who guided them along the way, and to share one last moment of celebration with the younger students who will follow in their footsteps.





Buzz-Worthy News from the West G Bees!

The West G Bees have been hard at work—both in and out of the hive. This September marked an exciting milestone for the beekeeping initiative on our main campus. This program, in partnership with Youth Bee Works, completed its **first successful honey extraction**, yielding 45 jars of fresh, locally produced honey.

Each jar contains 4 ounces of honey harvested from the school's own beehive. Members of the West G Bee Club are now developing a marketing strategy and selecting key school events where the honey will be available for purchase.

This initiative not only supports environmental education and sustainability but also provides valuable hands-on experience in entrepreneurship, marketing, and agriculture for our students. Stay tuned for upcoming sale opportunities—and a chance to enjoy a truly local product.



West Geauga STEM Program Takes Off with New Certification Courses



The West Geauga High School STEM Program is entering an exciting new chapter this year, offering students innovative opportunities to earn industry-recognized certifications while still in high school. One of the most anticipated additions is the Aerial Drone Fundamentals course, designed to introduce students to the rapidly expanding field of unmanned aerial systems (UAS). Through a mix of classroom instruction and hands-on flight training, students will explore drone technology, flight mechanics, and safety protocols. Most importantly, the course prepares them to sit for the FAA Part 107 Remote Pilot Certification Exam—a requirement for legally operating drones for commercial purposes in the U.S.

With this certification, students can pursue careers or entrepreneurial ventures in fields such as aerial photography, surveying, mapping, inspections, and more. The course also emphasizes critical knowledge of airspace regulations, weather considerations, and flight safety—giving students a strong foundation in both technical skills and aviation responsibility.

Also new this year is Onshape Certification by Design, a course that immerses students in the world of computer-aided design (CAD) using Onshape, a professional, cloud-based 3D design platform. Students will develop core design competencies including sketching, extruding, assembling components, and creating detailed engineering drawings. By the end of the course, students will be prepared to earn the Onshape Associate Certification, giving them a valuable credential in industries like product design, engineering, and advanced manufacturing.

These new courses underscore West Geauga's commitment to providing future-ready learning experiences that connect students with real-world skills and career pathways. With growing demand in technology-driven fields, West G students are well-positioned to lead in the innovation economy.

Excel TECC Opportunities

West Geauga is a proud member of the Excel TECC consortium, which includes 10 local school districts. This year, 82 West Geauga students are enrolled in 22 different programs, including Auto Technology, Business, CADD Engineering, Construction, Cosmetology, Culinary Arts, Digital Photography and Filmmaking, Environmental Education, Exercise Science, Fire/EMS, Media and Technology, Nursing, Marketing, Medical programs, Performing Arts, TEACH, and Welding. These programs provide valuable, hands-on experiences that prepare students for success—whether they choose to enter the workforce or continue their education in college after graduation.



Expanded Career Opportunities for Students

Exciting things are happening at West Geauga Local Schools as students explore new and innovative pathways to their futures. Under the leadership of Jim Kish, Director of Career Pathways and Connections, the district is expanding career opportunities for all students—whether they plan to pursue college or enter the workforce directly after graduation.

Mr. Kish is working closely with students to create individualized career plans that align with their interests and goals. Through these plans, students are introduced to a wide range of real-world experiences designed to prepare them for success beyond the classroom.



One highlight of the program includes career speakers, who visit during the school day to share their professional experiences and insights. These presentations expose students to careers they may never have considered before. Additionally, students can participate in job shadowing opportunities, giving them a firsthand look at the daily responsibilities of professionals in their fields of interest.

Perhaps most exciting, many West G students are already engaging in work-based learning experiences with local employers. These partnerships allow students to develop skills, build networks, and gain valuable workplace knowledge while still in high school.

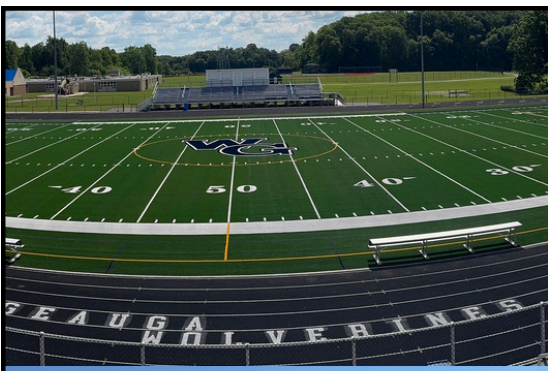


A major initiative that has gained momentum is the Pre-Apprenticeship program, first offered to all 11th- and 12th-grade students last year and now continuing with this year's juniors. This program equips students with essential career-readiness skills, including resume writing, interviewing techniques, and the proper use of artificial intelligence as a professional tool.

Mr. Kish is drawing on his 30+ years of experience and strong community connections at West Geauga to bring these opportunities to life. His commitment ensures that every student has access to meaningful career exploration—whether their path leads to higher education, technical training, or immediate entry into the workforce.



At West Geauga Local Schools, the message is clear: our students' futures matter, and we are committed to helping them unlock their full potential.



A Fresh Look for Fall

This summer was a busy one across the West Geauga campus. In just a few short months, our buildings and grounds saw an impressive list of projects—ranging from routine maintenance to major renovations—all carefully scheduled to avoid disrupting learning and to ensure student safety. While some updates may not be as visible, others have made an immediate impact. Here are the highlights:

Howell Field Turf Replacement and New Lighting

The turf at Howell Field was fully replaced in July, ensuring a safe playing surface for student-athletes. Thanks to years of careful upkeep, more than 90% of the existing fill was in excellent condition and was reused in the new field base—saving resources and maximizing investment.

A major storm caused irreparable damage to the Howell Field lighting system. Replacement with all brand new lights was completed just in time for the first evening home game of the fall season.

Sidewalk Improvements

Main sidewalks across all buildings were replaced with newly poured concrete, ensuring safe walkways.

Water Well Project

Planning is underway for a new well and water treatment facility on the main campus. The water well site has been selected, an access road completed, and board approval granted on the contract for well drilling, which will begin soon.

Little Wolverines Preschool

September marked the opening of a new preschool classroom at Westwood. The space features age-appropriate furnishings and a new outdoor play area, providing a warm and welcoming start for our youngest learners.

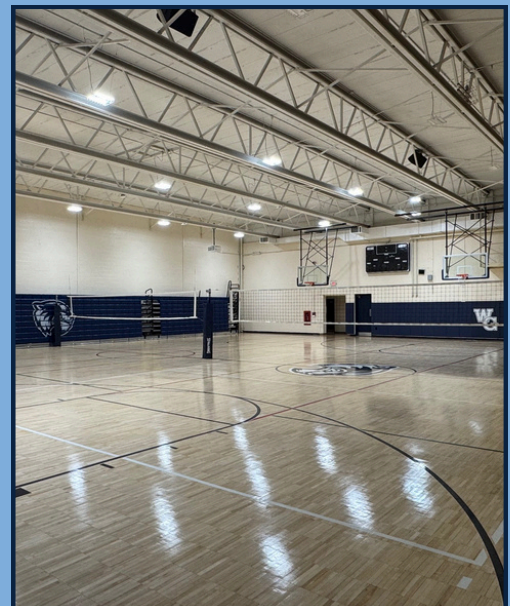
Middle School Renovations and Construction

The gymnasium received a much-needed facelift with new paint, refinished floors, updated wall padding, LED lighting, and brand-new bleachers. This refreshed space will benefit countless classes, athletic programs, performances, and community events.

Work began this summer on a generator system at the Middle School to power the district's main technology hub during outages. The project included expanding the mechanical room, trenching for wiring, installing a concrete pad, and fencing the area.

The middle school roof project was recently completed that included portions of complete replacement and areas of restoration. The new roof includes a 30 year warranty to ensure longevity.

Middle School hallways and classrooms were all updated with new brighter and energy efficient LED lights.



Recognizing Excellence

Mrs. Jennifer Molnar Recognized as the 2025 George B. Chapman Jr. Math Teacher of the Year

West Geauga Middle School teacher Mrs. Jennifer Molnar was honored by the Martha Holden Jennings Foundation as the 2025 George B. Chapman Jr. Math Teacher of the Year. This prestigious award celebrates her outstanding teaching abilities, extensive content knowledge, and steadfast dedication to student success in mathematics.

Established in memory of George B. Chapman Jr., this award is given each year to one Ohio mathematics educator whose work exemplifies classroom excellence and leadership in the field. Mrs. Molnar's selection is a testament to the high regard her colleagues hold for her and the significant impact she has had on both students and the school community.

Mrs. Molnar accepted her award at the Martha Holden Jennings Foundation's Annual Educator Awards Banquet in July, where she celebrated her achievement alongside other exceptional educators from across the state. In addition to this recognition, she received a \$7,500 grant to support a project or initiative of her choice within her classroom, school, or district. She was recognized at the August West Geauga Board of Education Meeting (pictured below with several of her children) for this wonderful accomplishment.



Dr. Richard Markwardt, recently retired West Geauga Superintendent, was chosen as the 2025 School Leader of the Year for Geauga/Portage County by the Educational Service Center of the Western Reserve. This prestigious award acknowledges a school leader who demonstrates vision, collaboration, and a strong commitment to enhancing student success. Dr. Markwardt's remarkable leadership at West Geauga Schools and his strong community connections were noted as examples of this well-deserved recognition.



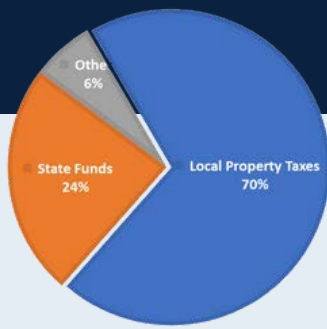
The Educational Service Center of the Western Reserve has honored Meagan Bellan, former Principal of West Geauga Middle School, as the 2025 Principal of the Year for Geauga/Portage County, recognizing her exceptional leadership in education. The award is given to one principal who exemplifies outstanding leadership, nurtures a positive school culture, and shows a strong dedication to enhancing student achievement. Meagan has taken on a new role this year as the Director of Curriculum and Instruction.



"The Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada (GFOA) has awarded the **Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting** to the West Geauga Local School District for its annual comprehensive financial report for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2024", as stated in a recent press release by GFOA.

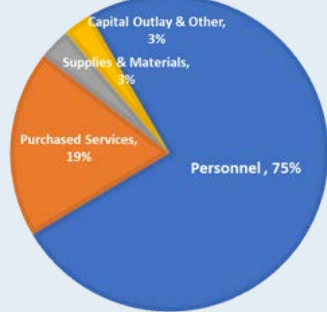
The statement continues, "The report has been judged by an impartial panel to meet the high standards of the program, which includes demonstrating a constructive "spirit of full disclosure" to clearly communicate its financial story and motivate potential users and user groups to read the report. The Certificate of Achievement is the highest form of recognition in the area of governmental accounting and financial reporting, and its attainment represents a significant accomplishment by a government and its management." Congratulations to the West Geauga Treasurer's Department.

Fiscal Year 2025 Financial Facts



What are the sources of revenue for the General Fund?

The majority of the District's general fund comes from local property taxes (70%), while the state contributes 24% of the total revenue. The State funding is derived from the state foundation payment and the State's portion of the property tax reimbursements for Homestead and Rollback credits. The remaining balance of 6% is from other sources which include interest income, tuition payments, Medicaid reimbursement and other.



How does the District spend its General Fund money?

Personnel (Salaries and Benefits) comprise 75% of the District's total expenditures. The balance of the District's expenditures includes purchased services (19%), supplies and materials (3%) and in capital outlay and other expenses (3%).

What are the facts related to the Substitute Levy that is on the ballot in November for the public's consideration?

The West Geauga Local Schools Board of Education voted to place a substitute levy on the ballot for the public's consideration for the November 4, 2025 election. If approved, the proposed levy would combine our two existing emergency levies into a single measure, in an effort to make school funding simpler and more efficient. The District obtains approximately 70% of its funding from local property taxes, with the two emergency levies representing about 16% of our total revenue.

What is a substitute levy?

Under Ohio Revised Code Section 5705.199, a substitute levy replaces one or more existing emergency levies at the same combined rate previously approved by voters. If approved, the levy would continue to fund school operations at the current level while allowing growth from new construction in the District.

How much would the substitute levy cost, if approved?

Homeowners currently pay \$169 for each \$100,000 of their appraised value for the two emergency levies. In addition, the two emergency levies are subsidized by the State to apply a 10% Non-Business Credit and 2.5% Owner-Occupancy "rollback credits" for most residential and agricultural properties. These additional credits would continue if the issue is approved as a substitute levy. The State of Ohio reimburses the District for the revenue lost due to these rollbacks, however, if the substitute levy is not approved and a new levy were to be used instead, the state reimbursement of approximately \$750,000 would be lost.

If approved, the final annual cost to homeowners for the substitute levy would be:

Example: House with \$100,000 market value

Market "Appraised" Value	\$100,000
X 35%	<u>.35</u>
Taxable Value	\$35,000
X # mills for substitute levy	<u>.00482</u>
Cost Before Credits	<u>\$168.70</u>
Less Non-Business Rollback Credit	<u>(\$ 16.87)</u>
Less Owner Occupied Rollback Credit	<u>(\$ 4.22)</u>
Annual Cost per \$100,000 MV	\$147.61

Why propose combining the two emergency levies?

Our two current emergency levies provide funding primarily for teacher and staff salaries.

The two emergency levies are set to expire. The \$3.7 million levy will expire in tax year 2026 and the \$2.35 million levy in tax year 2029. Combining them into one substitute levy of \$6.05 million will:

- Keep the same overall revenue needed to operate the schools
- Allow the District to collect revenue from new construction, which can reduce the tax share for existing homeowners over time
- Eliminate the need for multiple renewal elections, saving taxpayer dollars in election costs

If approved, would the Substitute levy raise my taxes?

No, if approved, you would pay the same as what you pay now for the two emergency levies combined. The substitute levy is designed to generate the same amount of operating revenue as the current emergency levies, plus revenue from any new construction.

The information being provided is merely factual, as district personnel are not allowed to advocate for or against the passage of the levy or bond issue during times they are being compensated by the district.



NON-PROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO. 362
CLEVELAND, OH

West Geauga Local Schools
8615 Cedar Road
Chesterland, Ohio 44026



ECRWSS
Local Postal Patron
Or Current Resident

WEST GEAUGA
LOCAL SCHOOLS

75

YEARS OF EXCELLENCE

1950 - 2025

