

# “The Quote”

[www.westirondequoit.org](http://www.westirondequoit.org)

March 2023

## Refining and refocusing Curriculum & Instruction

The COVID roller coaster over the past few years made the focus on curriculum and instruction more important than ever. So, it's no mistake that two of the four “Big Rocks” of our five-year Strategic Plan are Curriculum and Instruction (CI). The West Irondequoit Central School District has been committed to analyzing and revising our CI based on who our students are and their needs now, post-COVID as opposed to what they may have been four years ago. Indeed, the pandemic impacted children and learning that much. Some may wonder why we would want to revise CI following a time when many of us already felt so unsettled. But it's our job to ensure that students have curriculum and instruction that fit their experiences and who they are. What worked five, 10 or 20 years ago may not be what is best for our students today. We must adapt to meet their needs to best prepare them for success.



Students, including (front) Charlie Bohrer and Madelyn Quinlan, listen and learn from veteran Irondequoit High School teacher, Mr. Jim Thomas, in his French 5 class. The class is all seniors.

As a result, we have two Strategic Plan guideposts. Our big rock for curriculum is to “promote excellence, equity and inclusion through a viable and guaranteed curriculum.” Our big rock for instruction is to “establish instructional practices to ensure success for all learners.”

### CURRICULUM

Our District Curriculum Council (DCC) has created processes that encompass the idea of viable and guaranteed. The goal is to create standards-based curriculum guidance documents in which we set expectations for all learners in a particular grade level or focus area. Last year, we accomplished this by creating a new K-12 template for curriculum. It is now used to write and revise any curriculum in West Irondequoit, so it is authentic, rigorous, and reflective of our students. This year, the DCC is developing a systematic process to review and revise cur-

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## A Message from the Superintendent



Dear West Irondequoit families/residents:

By the time you receive this newsletter, we will be more than halfway through Year 2 of our Strategic Plan, a five-year blueprint for the district that we call “Choosing to Rise.”

When more than 30 diverse stakeholders began drafting this plan, we couldn't predict where we would be now but knew we must have a plan – a direction. We combed through data and feedback from students, staff and you – our community stakeholders – to create a map aimed at growth and evolution. Our plan defines four key areas to keep us focused and on course with our core commitments of setting high expectations where every student develops a passion for personal growth and development. Because of that drive and our talented staff of educators, our students achieve high levels.

I witness that spirit in our schools daily.

We rely on and trust our tremendously devoted staff who continue to carry us forward, and as you read the updates in this newsletter, please know that our progress continues because of a team effort with you, the community, as a critical partner.

I hope you have noticed and participated in surveys we have sent to our families. Your feedback is important, so please do not hesitate to reach out with any comments or questions. We are here to serve our district and your input is a valuable asset to our continued progress.

In partnership,

Aaron R. Johnson, Ed.D  
Superintendent of Schools

# Digging in on culturally responsive instruction

For the past two years, West Irondequoit has partnered with Dr. Jevon Hunter of the University of Buffalo to help bring to life in classrooms the philosophy of culturally responsive and sustaining instruction. This year, teachers who worked with Dr. Hunter in 2021-22 year continue to refine and expand their projects. We have also started a second teacher cohort, with more representation from STEAM and secondary teachers. As a result of this work, students across the district are learning through experiences that center their perspective and voice.

As a next step, our instructional administrative team will conduct a review of all critical inquiry he crafted over the past two years and identify which best align with grade level curriculum; selected inquiries will then be built into specific units of study. Our eventual goal: Ensure that these rich and engaging learning experiences are not teacher-dependent, but part of our district curriculum in which all students will engage.

## HERITAGE CELEBRATIONS

As curriculum development progresses, we are also hard at work to ensure students of all backgrounds see themselves in the culture of their buildings and district. To that end, we have assembled a team of local community members, district administrators and teachers, along with district partners, to develop a series of building-wide and classroom activities that work to celebrate diversity connected to our “Heritage Months.” Principals have shared many resources with their faculty and staff that have led to celebrations across the district.

For example, K-6 students have been part of read-aloud activities and art gallery walks and have engaged with speakers from local organizations. Most recently, students shared their thoughts on what Black History Month in February meant to them. Those videos were featured on district social media channels and are still available on the district YouTube channel (just look for the Black History Month playlist). Look for more of this work as we approach upcoming Heritage months like Women’s History Month, Disability Awareness Month and more!

## DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION

Our DEI Coalition kicked off this school year with its first in-person meeting and worked with West Irondequoit Director of Data, Assessment and Interventions, Mrs. Kelly Santora, on the analysis of discipline data. Teachers, administrators, students and community members considered current data trends and crafted questions for deeper analysis. The coalition also broke into subcommittees to continue working on implementing DEI practices within curriculum, hiring practices, and family engagement.



Colebrook third-graders Stori and Viviana display the people they researched for Black History Month, former astronauts Mae Jemison and Guy Bluford.

## KINDERGARTEN REGISTRATION

Students are eligible for our full-day kindergarten program in September 2023 if they will be 5 years of age on or before Dec. 1, 2023. **The deadline to register a child for the 2023-24 school year is April 1st.** Letters with information were mailed home and emailed to families with eligible children in February. Our parent orientations occurred in the beginning of March. Registration information can be found online on the front page of our website at [westirondequoit.org](http://westirondequoit.org). Children attending private, parochial, charter schools or homeschool still must be registered. Questions? Call the registrar’s office at 336-6743.

# Capital Improvement Project: No tax impact

Here are the important numbers about the proposed Capital Improvement Project that will be on the 2023 ballot May 16th along with the District Budget & Candidate election:

- \$19.1 million
- \$0 impact on taxpayers

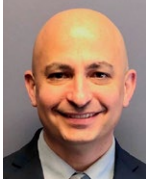
The actual total cost is \$19,075,000 and, indeed, it would have no impact on your tax bill. District leaders have been developing this project over the past few years with our partners, CPL (architect) and Campus Construction. A major piece to the project is relocating our Department of Environmental Services (DOES) building from Washington Avenue to the Lakeview site on Pattonwood Drive. This will allow for all DOES departments to be located together and provide ample space for vehicle repair and storage. The entire proposed list:

- Bridge between Dake and IHS
- Select mechanical system replacements at IHS, Dake and Rogers/Southlawn
- IHS Auditorium house lighting replacement
- Dake interior door replacement
- Age-appropriate playground additions at Rogers/Southlawn schools and Iroquois MS
- Library renovations at Rogers/Southlawn and Iroquois MS
- Relocate/renovate Lakeview to accommodate Dept. of Environmental Services

Look for more information on the district website in the coming weeks.

# New district personnel

The West Irondequoit CSD has welcomed four people to our administrative team. Here is some brief information on each.



## **Troy Bajardi, Dake Jr. HS Principal**

Mr. Bajardi started at Dake in early January after spending four-plus years as an Assistant Principal at Greece Olympia HS. Prior to that, he taught at Victor, Penfield and Shenendehowa and was a Pre-K/K-12 Activities & Athletics Coordinator in the Cayman Islands. His wife, Kristina, is a Lead Teacher at Listwood/Southlawn. They reside in Penfield with their two children.



## **Christopher Shellard, Director of Safety & Security**

Mr. Shellard started his new role in early March. He worked in the Monroe County Sheriff's Office as a Captain from 1996 until retiring last month. He started in the Jail Bureau in 1996 and spent 1993-95 with the MCSO as a part-time Seasonal Deputy. He and his wife, Jacki, a library clerk at Brookview, have lived in West Irondequoit since 2012. Their three children, Daniel (Class of 2020), Madeleine (2018) and Colin (2016) are all IHS graduates.



## **Joanna Rowe, K-6 Director of Student Services**

Mrs. Rowe was appointed in October 2022 after serving as the Rochester School District's Director of Special Education since 2019. Before that, she was a Coordinating Administrator of Special Education following 15 years as an RCSO Special Education teacher. She and her husband, Jason, live in West Irondequoit.



## **Casey Wagner, Director of Technology**

Mrs. Wagner joined our team in November 2022 after serving for nearly two years as Coordinator of Technology Integration for Wayne-Finger Lakes/Genesee Valley BOCES. Prior to that, she was a Social Studies teacher and Innovation Specialist at Palmyra-Macedon HS for 11 years. Mrs. Wagner and her husband, Paul, live in Penfield with their daughter, Ellie. [»](#)

# Curriculum & Instruction *Continued from the cover*

riculum. This will help us ensure constant attention to keeping curriculum relevant, as well as monitor the effectiveness of any created or revised curriculum on student success.

COVID federal stimulus funds also allowed us to explore new programs to support our curriculum as well. Within the federal grants, we were able to allocate funds to purchase high-quality, research-based programs for elementary English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics. We have introduced Core Knowledge Language Arts, which is a science of reading-based program to help us close early reading gaps for all students. Next year, we will provide professional development for staff on a new math program for K-6 students. We haven't selected new ELA or math programs to support curriculum since the early 2010s, so this is an exciting opportunity for our students and staff. These types of programs will help us to respond to student needs while providing for authentic learning experiences. Creating guaranteed and viable curriculum isn't necessarily a new idea, but with the shifts between remote, hybrid and in-person learning, it is essential.

## **INSTRUCTION**

We also have explored how to ensure best practices for instruction. Two summers ago, we surveyed the community to gain insights as to how to best utilize COVID Federal Stimulus Funds. With that data, and our student achievement and behavioral data, we have been using the funds to double down on instructional supports we know have yielded increased student success. For example, we have added eight intervention/gap closure positions. These positions provide high intensity, targeted interventions to students in need across our district. Student progress is formally reviewed at least three times during the school year and informally on a regular basis. We have been able to

focus these positions on early intervention, as well as target supports at the secondary level where student data showed a need. Additionally, we utilized the funds to add more special education teachers to decrease the gaps of special education students. As a result, we can deliver more personalized instruction. We have also been able to set up a robust K-12 intensive tutoring program before and after school with support provided by our own staff. Last summer alone, we supported more than 100 students through the K-12 intensive tutoring program. Nearly double that number was serviced last school year through before/after school tutoring and drop-in sessions. We are pleased to be able to continue this program through summer 2023.

While increasing staffing through stimulus funds has been one way to address student needs, we also have focused on more sustainable efforts through our greater work regarding instruction. This school year we rolled out the West Irondequoit CSD K-12 Instructional Model. Rooted in researched-based best practices, it is another way we're working to align high expectations for all students. We believe there are certain instructional practices all students will benefit from and it's our promise to the community that each classroom will utilize them.

We also wanted to share with you more about Data Wise, an eight-step model that guides our staff to collaborate on and improve teaching and learning through data-based analysis. On the back cover of this newsletter, you can read more about how we've worked to identify a new data dashboard to increase student data accessibility.

Our commitment to guaranteed and viable curriculum and instruction is paramount. We continue to focus on cultivating rich, engaging and thought provoking experiences for all our students. [»](#)



**Superintendent**  
Dr. Aaron Johnson

**Board of Education**  
Mr. Matthew Metras, President  
Mr. Matthew Sullivan, Vice President  
Mr. Justin Connor  
Mrs. Ann Cunningham  
Ms. Courtney Shouse  
Mrs. Rosa Vargas-Cronin  
Mr. John Vay

Mrs. Jenna Lustig, District Clerk

Lucie Graziano, Student Representative  
Nick Onorato, Student Representative  
Ava Palo, Student Representative

**Newsletter Editor**  
Mr. Jeff DiVeronica

## Annual District Vote & Election

**Tuesday, May 16, 2023**  
**6 a.m. – 9 p.m.**

**Vote location:**  
**St. Paul Blvd. Fire Dept.**  
**433 Cooper Rd.**

**Candidates' Night:**  
**Monday, May 1**

Check the district website for details on the location. There are two Board of Education positions up for election this year. Candidates' nominating petitions are due to the district clerk by April 17.

**Budget Hearing:**  
**Thursday, May 4, 7 p.m.**

The Board of Education will hold a Budget Hearing to share details of the proposed budget. Additional presentations may be scheduled. Go to [westirondequoit.org](http://westirondequoit.org) or call 585-336-3067 for updates. We expect there will be time to ask questions at the Budget Hearing.

### Absentee Ballots

Absentee ballots are available for those who qualify. Contact District Clerk Jenna Lustig at 585-336-2983 or [jenna\\_lustig@westiron.monroe.edu](mailto:jenna_lustig@westiron.monroe.edu).

## District pursues live data system to track, enhance student progress

One of the many goals of the district's five-year Strategic Plan (this is Year 2) is to develop a system with live, readily accessible data to track students' academic performance, attendance, social emotional growth and behavior. We want administrators and teachers to be able to respond to data quickly to support every child, every day.

By having data at our fingertips, we can support students efficiently in all four areas, helping them strive for "peak performance" as we develop the whole child. A data system that allows for live dashboards will also further our ability to drill down by demographic areas as we move toward goals of equity, access and inclusion.

In an effort to achieve this, a Data Warehouse Committee (DWC) was formed last October. It was comprised of classroom teachers, interventionists, social emotional support staff (counselors, social workers), teacher leaders, data team members and administrators at the building and district levels. Through a series of meetings, the DWC identified our "why" in connection to the Strategic Plan and determined what features of a data warehouse and data dashboard system are important to be able elevate our work with students. The DWC identified criteria from the various stakeholder groups that would anchor feedback and decision-making processes. Some of the major criteria identified by the DWC was around ease of use and integration with our current systems, automation and early warning signs, disaggregated data and ability to drill down to students' needs and immediately provide intervention plans in key areas, system supports data to drive intervention and instruction and a system that provides data on the whole child.

The DWC researched four different products, as vendors provided presentations and demonstrations. After each, stakeholders provided individual feedback on the identified criteria along with any other feedback they found essential in our decision-making process. Also, multiple reference checks were conducted from current District-users of each product around our criteria along with any other essential information from current users that would help us decide.

The DWC was unanimous in its vote, choosing a top product that is efficient, comprehensive and aligned to District initiatives. As we move into the budgeting season and look to implement a new data dashboard system, we are excited for how this process and product will elevate the work we do with our students every day in support of equity and access of supports for all. 🗨️