

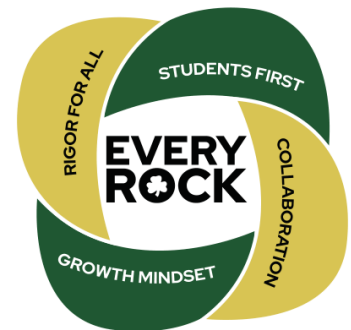
The Four Cornerstones of Culture at WHS

By Alicia Denniston, Principal

Every day, I am proud to be the principal of Westfield High School. An exceptional staff and incredible students make it a blessing to serve each day. Although this year has been sending us an array of challenges, I couldn't be prouder of the staff and students of our school—who have been determined to rise to the challenges and come out stronger on the other side.

Although WHS was not the high school I graduated from, it certainly has become home to me. I began my journey at WHS as a Spanish and ESL teacher in 2007 and then joined the Leadership Team as an assistant principal in 2008 and then became principal in 2020. I fell in love with the school—the students, the staff, the culture, and the spirit and pride that is so pervasive inside and outside of our walls.

The culture of a school is the culmination of crucial intangible elements that are built over time and stand the test of time. At WHS, there are four cornerstones of culture we emphasize in the hiring process and then work as a staff to foster and strengthen within our students. We also teach our staff and students the pillars of the Westfield Way—grounded in love as our foundation and servant leadership at the apex, the pillars focus on how we treat ourselves and one another.



While our mission remains “Life Ready” and preparing each and every student for the day after graduation, that is only achieved when our culture is thriving and when each and every individual feels supported and valued. While we know there is always work to do, I want you to understand our strife and what WHS desires to be for our students. I wanted to take this opportunity to help our students, parents and community understand the facets of the culture we strive for at WHS. This blog will focus on our cornerstones of culture. These are the four beliefs I want each and every staff member, regardless of their role, to believe in their core. Then that belief turns into action.

STUDENTS FIRST. PERIOD.

We are here to serve students.

We aim to place their interests and their needs above our own preferences or what is most comfortable for us. That is why we adapt and change, seek to be relevant in our teaching practices and why we listen to our students. It is through the “student first” lens that we make our decisions and channel our school improvement goals.

COLLABORATION

We are better together than we are on our own.

Teachers who love to exist in isolation inside the walls of their classrooms will not like it at WHS. We gather together weekly in our professional learning communities to plan together, share lessons and assessments and put our heads together to examine how our students are performing and make changes to help them do better. This is one of the driving forces that make us a “Model PLC School at Work.” We promote cooperative learning in our classrooms and on our clubs and athletic teams.

RIGOR FOR ALL

We believe ALL students are capable of high levels of critical thinking and learning.

At WHS, we set high expectations for our students because we want them to be prepared for the day they leave us. The more prepared they are, the more opportunities they have later on. Their options are wide open because the skills they have been equipped with at WHS will follow them into their career fields. While we believe all of our students need to be challenged, learn grit and hard work, we also believe in providing EACH student with unique supports and strategies to help them meet the learning challenges.

GROWTH MINDSET

We reflect. We learn. We grow.

This cornerstone is all about self-reflection, learning, and growth. We take risks, are not afraid to fail and we commit to learning from our mistakes and from the challenges that come our way. More important than grades is how we grow in our skill level. When we don't do well the first time on an assessment, we encourage our students to practice some more and try again. It is the same for us as educators. At the end of each day, we reflect upon the day: how did things go, did our students learn? What do we need to do differently? We set goals, celebrate successes and continue to grow.

“Life Ready” is only achieved when our culture is thriving and each individual feels supported and valued.

I hope that you will join me on my journey to highlight events, actions and people at WHS that exemplify our cornerstones of culture. I will be doing a monthly blog and a video recap to highlight the incredible accomplishments of our students and staff. My hope is that these stories will inspire and encourage you and that we will team together to more deeply infuse these cornerstones and ideals into the fabric of our school.