

# Westhaven Elementary School

## Belleville Public School District 118

### School Context

Belleville Public School District #118, located in southwest Illinois about 17 miles east of St. Louis, Missouri, consists of 8 elementary schools, 2 junior high schools and one early childhood facility with a total enrollment of 3,695 students. Westhaven Elementary serves 482 students. The majority of the student population is white. The district's African-American student population is 32 percent; Westhaven Elementary serves an African-American student population of 25.9 percent. Both the district and Westhaven Elementary have a low percentage of Hispanic students compared to the state; as a result the district serves remarkably few English Language Learners (0.2%), and Westhaven Elementary does not serve any English Language Learners. The low-income rates of the district (49%) and Westhaven School (55.2%) are significantly higher than the state average of 37.9 percent, but in spite of this the district has some of the highest achievement scores in the state of Illinois. District schools received Golden Spike Awards, State and National Blue Ribbon School Awards, and in 2003 two elementary schools in the district, including Westhaven Elementary, received Illinois Spotlight School Awards for Academic Achievement. Furthermore, the superintendent was selected as Illinois Superintendent of the Year in 2004.

The district's basic philosophy is to always look at ways to improve. According to the assistant superintendent looking at "what went right, what went wrong, what needs to continue and what needs to be fixed" is embedded in the culture of the district.

The district has a long history of administering local benchmark assessments, analyzing the data and using the results to improve instruction. District staff feels a moral obligation to do everything they can for their students so they can reach their potential; the superintendent always asks the question "what is the best for the kids?" The superintendent runs a tight ship; most of the policies and procedures at Westhaven Elementary are initiated by the district. Every principal is seen as 'the CEO of his/her building', but the superintendent feels that site-based management is not practical. The district emphasizes and facilitates collaboration across the district to get input from each campus in setting the district policies.

### Curriculum and Academic Goals

**The district curriculum is based on the Illinois Learning Standards, but alignment to the state standards is primarily a function of state and local assessments.** Most of the curriculum development in the district is handled through committee work of teachers. Ideas and issues first go to the District Curriculum Committee. If necessary, a separate subcommittee is set up, for example in the case of new textbook adoption. Teachers have a yearly plan to guide their instruction; curriculum maps break the state standards for each state goal down in more specific skills for grades K-8. The Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum however, states that aligning the curriculum to the state standards is easy to do since the standards are so broad.

### Student Demographics\*:

	<i>Westhaven EI</i>	<i>Belleville PSD</i>	<i>Illinois</i>
% Low Income	55.2	49.0	37.9
% Limited English-Proficient	0.0	0.2	6.3
% Mobility	17.6	19.2	16.4
Student Ethnic/Racial Distribution			
% White	70.1	64.4	58.6
% African-American	25.9	32.0	20.7
% Hispanic	2.3	1.7	17.0
% Asian/Pacific Islander	1.2	1.4	3.6
% Native American	0.4	0.5	0.2

He sees the state assessment, which he calls “very challenging”, as the most important element of the standards based system. The district further aligns their curriculum with local benchmark assessments.

**Student achievement in the areas of both academics and character is the highest priority for all educators in District #118.** The assistant superintendent indicates that the district has informally adopted the ISAT as their measure of success. The unspoken rule for all educators in the district is that “you have to beat the state average”. Besides academic achievement, the district places a strong emphasis on developing good citizens as well. The district implemented an extensive character education program and each building continues a Character Education committee that fosters and encourages character education throughout the curriculum.

**School improvement is mainly handled at the campus level. Westhaven’s focus is on students who fall below state standards.** A School Improvement Team of teachers at each school develops a comprehensive School Improvement Plan outlining the goals and priorities for the next school year based on the analysis of student achievement data from national, state and local benchmark assessments. The School Improvement Team continues to meet throughout the school year to monitor progress towards the goals. Westhaven’s School Improvement Plan focuses on students who fall below standards and contains five measurable goals based on data and gap analysis of the ISAT and district exit tests. Each goal is accompanied by

a detailed integrated action plan and the supporting state standards. Westhaven’s School Improvement Plan also includes the improvement of school climate with regard to student behavior as reflected in student and teacher opinion surveys. In addition to the School Improvement Plan, each principal submits a set of campus goals and objectives to the superintendent at the beginning of each school year.

**Staff Selection and Capacity Building**

**Teacher recruitment is not a challenge for the district because of its strong university partnerships and good reputation.** Student teachers from seven different universities work in the district. In addition, the good name and teacher compensation package ensure a strong candidate pool. The district is dedicated to hiring the very best people. Although the selection process is basic in nature, teachers indicate that it is very challenging to get a teaching position in the district. Candidates conduct a group interview with all principals in the district; then the hiring principal conducts a second interview. The principal makes a recommendation to the Superintendent, who conducts a final interview.

**New principals and teachers receive intensive mentoring and training.** Most principals in the district are ‘home grown’. The superintendent encourages teachers with outstanding teaching and communication skills to go into administration. New principals are hired a year before they actually start to function as principal and they spend every second of that year with the retiring principal. The district also outlines month by month activities for all principals. For new teachers, the district organizes a new teacher workshop at the beginning of the year. A district wide first-year teachers meeting is organized once a month. Mentor teachers are assigned to newly hired teachers. They are expected to meet once per week, but see each other daily. In conjunction with a local university, District #118 offers new teachers the opportunity to get four graduate credit hours by attending a support program specifically designed for first year teachers.

**Student Achievement\*:** Percentage of students scores meeting or exceeding the Illinois Learning Standards for the grades and subjects tested on the ISAT.

<i>Westhaven EI</i>	2001-02	2002-03
<b>Grade 3</b>		
Reading	87.1	85.4
Mathematics	92.5	94.1
Writing	92.4	81.3
<b>Grade 4</b>		
Science	92.8	93.3
Social Science	92.9	90.0
<b>Grade 5</b>		
Reading	62.8	86.3
Mathematics	80.0	92.2
Writing	70.6	72.5

**The district expects and enables collaboration between all schools; Westhaven School teachers rely on collaboration to improve their teaching.**

The district wide Curriculum Committee has representatives from every school and every grade level to promote vertical alignment. Several times a year teachers across the district meet in a district-wide grade level meeting, chaired by representatives from the Curriculum Committee, to ensure curricular coherence across schools. Stipends are paid to teachers to attend at least two meetings. The district calendar includes early release on Wednesdays to facilitate collaboration, but teachers at Westhaven School indicate that they meet daily as a grade level. Teachers from different grade levels work together on the School Improvement Plan. They also review students' exit tests and talk to their teachers from the year before to understand the achievement levels of their incoming class. Principals meet with district administrators every month in an all day principals' meeting. The principal and the teachers all state that the collaboration between and within schools is what makes the district so successful.

**District #118 provides financial incentives and release time for professional development. Most activities are selected at the campus level.**

The majority of the district's professional development budget is spent on stipends for the School Improvement Teams to meet. Teachers receive a salary credit when they take university courses and move up the salary scale after earning a Master's Degree. The district also pays stipends to teachers who take the Research and Development classes that are offered through the union. The first two days in the district school calendar are set aside for professional development. Teachers may also take two leave days for professional development each year.

Professional development is not mandated by the district, but teachers say there is an expectation that they serve on committees and participate in professional development activities. Teachers also say the activities do not need to be mandated since they are so helpful and interesting.

### **Instructional Programs, Practices and Arrangements**

**District wide teacher committees select all instructional materials.** When the district is looking at new textbook adoption, a committee of teachers will be assigned in such a way that there is representation from each grade level and each campus. The committee reviews several textbooks and invites company representatives from the top three choices to come in for a meeting. The committee sets up guidelines that determine what will be discussed with regard to standards. The final choice is made by consensus, the committee does not vote. If consensus cannot be reached, the district administration gets involved. The textbook committees are thorough in their review. According to the assistant superintendent, studying science programs takes a year and studying programs for English language arts is a two year process. After a new textbook adoption the committee continues to meet for another full year to study the series and identify key chapters. The district always supports new textbook adoptions with mandatory teacher in-service.

#### **Teacher Demographics\*:**

	<i>Westhaven EI</i>	<i>Belleville PSD</i>	<i>Illinois</i>
Average Teaching Experience	--	14.2	13.9
% of Teachers with Bachelors Degrees	--	65.6	53.9
% of Teachers with Master's Degrees	--	34.4	46.0
% of Teachers with Emergency or Provisional Credentials	0.0	0.0	2.5
% of Classes Not Taught by Highly Qualified Teachers	0.0	0.0	2.1

**Teachers are free to choose instructional practices and additional resources for their classrooms. Effective methods and materials are shared district wide.** All the materials are supplied by the district, but teachers say that they are able to “put their own spin on things”; the primary issue is that students learn the skills. According to the assistant superintendent for curriculum some teachers use a whole language approach in English language arts, some use phonics, and others use both. The district does mandate teachers to use a lot of open-ended problem solving. Teachers can use additional resources as well. When teachers find materials that work, they share them in the monthly grade level meetings. When teachers find materials that yield good results, they share it in the monthly grade level meeting.

**The Character Education program is also developed at the district level; Westhaven’s teachers collaborate to ensure strong discipline codes and consistent enforcement.** The district mandates using the character word of the month throughout the curriculum and teaching the violence prevention program. The Kindergarten teacher explains that classroom discipline is maintained by ‘setting the tone the first day of school’. All the Kindergarten teachers have the same disciplinary policy. Teachers talk about the character word of the month with their students and discuss how they are going to use it on the playground.

**Instructional time for different subject areas is determined at the district level.** The District Curriculum Committee installed a Minutes Committee to make recommendations based on the content area and the state standards. The district gives teachers an outline of how many minutes per week they need to focus their instruction in each subject area; teachers incorporate those recommendations in their classroom schedules. The superintendent explains that the district encourages teachers to teach reading and math in the morning during optimum learning time.

**Student grouping in the district is heterogeneous.** Westhaven’s teachers sometimes group by ability-level and sometimes group to accommodate for peer tutoring. Special education students are mainstreamed as much as possible. Special education teachers use the same programs and materials as the regular teachers. Westhaven School had a self-contained Learning Disabled class until the 2003-04 school year, but in the 2004-05 school year all LD-students will be sent back to their home schools for full inclusion with support services because research shows that inclusion leads to higher student achievement. The district expects that this arrangement will result in more students with Individual Education Plans making the Adequate Yearly Progress requirement.

#### Instructional Information\*:

	<i>Westhaven EI</i>	<i>Belleville PSD</i>	<i>Illinois</i>
Pupil/Teacher Ratio	—	22.9	18.4
Average class size			
- Grade K	23.5	23.4	20.6
- Grade 1	24.5	21.6	21.3
- Grade 3	25.0	23.6	22.5
<b>Time devoted to teaching core subjects (minutes/day in grade 3):</b>			
- Mathematics	65	65	56
- Science	29	29	30
- English/ Language Arts	155	155	146
- Social Science	30	30	31

## Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis and Use of Data

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**District #118 has a history of monitoring student achievement through the analysis of national, state and local assessment data.** To monitor the effectiveness of its instructional programs and the academic progress of students, the district implemented the Instructional Monitoring System (IMS) in the early 1970's. This system provided an opportunity for the instructional staff to analyze data relevant to the school improvement planning process. With the advent of state goals, academic standards and heightened accountability, this process was refined and brought into compliance with state mandates. District assessments monitor student progress towards the Illinois Learning Standards. Locally developed exit tests are administered each year in various subject areas. District staff analyzes those data in the summer. School Improvement Teams at each school use the achievement data from the exit tests for school improvement planning in the summer. The principal of Westhaven Elementary says: "If district wide we see that the writing scores are dropping, then the District Writing Committee will start working on improvement. And within the building we do that with the School Improvement Team." All educators interviewed mention the exit tests as a wonderful resource, especially because individual item analyses of test questions is possible, allowing teachers to really 'pinpoint' their instruction. The district also administers the Iowa Test of Basic Skills at the beginning of the year in each grade to see how their students compare nationally. In grades 2 and 5 the Cognitive Abilities Test is administered to determine which students qualify for placement in gifted programs. Westhaven teachers also monitor the progress of the students on a weekly basis. All teachers use portfolios which parents sign off on every week. Teachers keep track of all the books their students have read with the Reading Counts program. The Kindergarten teachers measure progress on goals identified for each of the learning centers.

**The performance of all staff is closely monitored in District #118.** The principal formally monitors tenured teachers once every two years. Non-tenured teachers receive a formal evaluation two times every year. Although the teacher evaluations are not officially tied to student achievement data, the principal does look at ISAT and exit test scores and uses it as a tool to improve their teaching. And the superintendent indicates that non-tenured teachers will be dismissed if they do not improve their scores. The district administrative team establishes mutually agreed upon common goals at the beginning of the school year. Principals submit documentation toward the attainment of those goals to the superintendent at the end of the school year. The superintendent and the assistant superintendent each schedule informal on-site visits with principals to discuss issues related to the successful operation of each school. A formal principal evaluation takes place at the end of the school year. Finally, not only principals and teachers are monitored: support staff and paraprofessionals receive performance evaluations as well.

## Recognition, Intervention and Adjustment

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**Student recognition programs are implemented at the campus level. Recognition programs focus on both academic and non-academic achievement.** Student achievement is recognized by honor rolls, high academic achievement awards and 'Rising Star' awards for students who have made good behavioral or academic progress. Westhaven School appoints a 'king and queen of manners'. The awards are given at a quarterly assembly to which the parents are invited. Each grade level in the school has a digital camera. When students achieve certain reading goals, they get to post their picture on 'the mountain of reading.' The PRIDE (Patriots Responsible in Daily Education) club is established to reward positive behavior. PRIDE club activities take place every Friday and include things as special treats, free recess, movies or games. Staff and students are also recognized in a newsletter.

**Intervention programs are tailored to each student’s individual needs. The school depends on volunteers for tutoring.** Individual Student Improvement Plans are set up and reviewed quarterly when students are working below grade level. Teachers find these plans very helpful because they help to engage parents in the learning process and make them jointly responsible for the child’s learning. The plans also provide parents with options that can enhance their child’s learning outside the regular school day. Programs for struggling students at Westhaven Elementary include an early childhood program and Reading Recovery in the first grade. Volunteers from Americorps and Big Brother Big Sisters provide tutoring and some teachers stay voluntarily to tutor students as well. The gifted program in the district is not very elaborate. Gifted students are pulled out for one hour per week. A social worker works with students struggling in non-academic areas. The district also wrote a grant to buy vans so they can drive students to the dentist and doctor’s appointments.

**Factors Influencing District and School Practices**

**Resource Allocation**

**Finances are mentioned as a primary challenge for the district.** By having high test scores, the district is ineligible for some funds including summer reading programs and gifted programs. The superintendent feels that the district is being punished financially for doing a good job. Despite the lack of funding, the superintendent refuses to cut any programs: “I will run this district to the edge of financial ruin before cutting any programs.”

**Resource Allocation\*:**

	<i>Belleville PSD</i>	<i>Illinois</i>
Instructional Expenditure per Pupil	\$4,358	\$4,842
Operating Expenditure per Pupil	\$7,543	\$8,181
% Expenditure per Function		
Instruction	37.3	45.5
General Administration	2.1	2.5
Supporting Services	26.8	31.0
Other Expenditures	33.8	21.0

\*Financial Indicators 2001-02

**Local Influences, Relationships and Communication**

**The district enjoys positive relationships with both the Board and the Teachers’ Union.** The Superintendent describes the relationship with the Board as wonderful. He considers the Board members highly skilled and often bounces ideas off of them. The Board has let the administration make all the hiring decisions. The superintendent meets monthly with an advisory group consisting of teachers and union leaders. He perceives the role of the union as strong and positive and says: “They are not an adversarial barrier, yet they are a group to be reckoned with.” All teachers in the district are members of the union. The superintendent and the Union President make a joint appearance at the district’s new teacher orientation to encourage new teachers to become members of the union. The superintendent feels that a great deal of divisiveness within the staff is prevented by having all the teachers in agreement about unionism.

**The district has a large community outreach program.** Schools work closely with their school community councils. Westhaven School opens their gym up for community activities. The district organizes activities such as senior citizens luncheons and Veteran’s Day. District and school administrators actively use the local media to showcase their successes.

**Educators recognize the role of parents in the learning process and try to engage them in their child’s education.** Every Wednesday throughout District #118’s elementary schools, a ‘white envelope’ containing information from the school and district office is sent home to parents. The first report card is not sent home, parents have to come to the parent teacher conference to pick it up. The principal makes home visits to parents who do not come to the parent teacher conferences. The school principal says “if we have parents on board with us, we will have the student on board.” The school organizes a Family Math Night each year where parents are invited to the school to do math problem-solving activities along with their child. Teachers try to involve parents in the learning process; e.g. the Kindergarten teachers show parents how they teach reading so they can use the materials that are sent home. Teachers also make an effort to recruit parent volunteers to help out in the classroom. Parents have the opportunity to fill out a survey each year to evaluate the facilities, teachers and the principal. The results of this survey are used in the School Improvement Plan.

**Communication among levels of the system is a priority in Belleville School District #118.**

Principals meet with district administrators in a monthly all day administrative meeting. The District Curriculum Committee and its subcommittees all report back to their schools and solicit input at the school level. All staff members have access to the superintendent. Teachers describe the overall climate as very close and caring. They talk about the open communication within the district. A teacher says: "When there is a problem, I use the chain of command. I would not have any problems to pick up the phone and call the superintendent." Teachers also fill out a yearly survey that evaluates the principal, school and students.

**Core Beliefs about Teaching and Learning**

Belleville School District is committed to developing every bit of potential in every student. The district is supportive of the accountability movement, but generally feels that the AYP requirement of the NCLB legislation is unreasonable. All respondents at the district, school and classroom level agree with the statement "all children can learn", but the superintendent adds that "not all children can learn at the same pace"; the assistant superintendent says that "it is unrealistic to think that 100 percent of the students will be able to meet the ISAT standards" and the school principal adds that "not every student is going to be a rocket scientist."