

Westside Wire

News and Information for WESTSIDE HIGH SCHOOL

Parents and the West Houston Community.

Volume 15 Issue 2

November 2009



A Measure of Success

By: Mr. Paul Castro, Principal

The only tangible work that schools produce are transcripts. Grades are the lifeblood of all schools. They are the primary way which we communicate information around our work—student learning. Knowing that, it is amazing that there is so little thought given to our use of grades in the day-to-day operation of our school. Sure, teachers spend hours creating assignments and grading them, but that is not what I'm talking about.

A grade should serve two purposes. One, it should communicate student learning success to the student, the teacher, his or her parents, school administration, and the post-high-school world (potential employers and colleges). Secondly, it should provide feedback to the student

that encourages him or her to continue working on the learning goals. This idea about motivation is similar to what works for us as adults. Diets that don't knock off some pounds quickly are quickly knocked off. Bosses that do nothing but criticize cannot maintain their staff's morale or attention for long. We have a responsibility to balance criticism and constructive feedback.

To serve the first purpose, we are working on a policy to better define our grades. We have instituted a 70%-30% split on major and minor grades. We have done this in order to clarify what students have learned in relation to the curriculum. Any major grade must meet certain standards: it must be linked to the state curriculum, it must be a grade that all team teachers (ex.

all Algebra I teachers) have agreed to administer, and it must be graded in the same way (agreement on extra credit, curves, etc.). Since this will be true of all major grades, we know that the great majority of the value of our grades will be aligned. That way, we know that regardless of what teacher a student has, that student will have earned essentially the same grade, regardless of the teacher. We also increased the major grade to reduce the impact of non-aligned grades, such as pop-quizzes, extra-credit, and daily work, that may or may not be lined up with the curriculum.

Finally, we are using our site-based decision-making committee to look at the impact of a

(Continued on page 2)

Calendar of Events at Westside High—Home of the Wolves

November

- 3 PTO Meeting, 7 p.m., Library
- 5-6 "Reviving Ophelia" 7 p.m., Black Box
- 7 Tutorials
- 10 Veteran's Day Concert, 7 p.m., Auditorium
- 11 Teen Truth Assemblies
- 14 Tutorials, 8 a.m.
- 18 Report Cards
- 19 Dance No Costume, 7 p.m., Auditorium
- 21 HISD Dance Montage, 4 p.m., Auditorium

November

25-29 NO SCHOOL

December

- 3 Orchestra Concert, 7 p.m., Auditorium
- Progress Reports
- 5 Tutorials, 8 a.m.
- SAT at WHS
- 7-11 Book Fair, 7:30 a.m.-3 p.m., Library
- 8 Choir Concert, 7 p.m., Auditorium
- 10 Band Winter Concert, 7 p.m., Auditorium
- 12 Tutorials, 8 a.m.
- 21-31 NO SCHOOL
- 5 Band Concert, 7 p.m., MT

January

- 1-4 NO SCHOOL
- 5 Alumni Breakfast, 8:30 a.m., Library
- 12 PTO Meeting, 7 p.m., Library
- 13 Report Cards
- 16 Tutorials, 8 a.m.
- 21 Community Open House, 6:45 p.m.
- 23 Tutorials, 8 a.m.

For a complete calendar of Westside events, visit us at www.westsidewolves.org. Please confirm dates and times on our website or by calling 281-920-8000.

(Continued from page 1)

policy passed by the Legislature this summer that overturned a WHS policy. Senate Bill 2033 disallowed school administration from mandating a minimum grade other than a zero. Based on years of assessment research and studies about human behavior and motivation theory, we had instituted a minimum grade of a 50 for missing or low work. What we found out is that those grades were much more accurate in relation to communicating student learning success. The zero was essentially a negative-70 point pull on the student's average, and was overly influential in the final grade. When we limited the failing range to 20 points, it did two things—provided us a clearer idea of what students were and were not learning. Secondly, we found that students who were asleep at the wheel at the start of the year and had a slightly higher failing average still had a chance to wake up and redeem themselves with improved work and improved learning.

We are going to continue to look at ways to make grades accurate and precise. We owe our students nothing less. Thank you for your partnership with us to make our practices better and better.

A Look Ahead at Upcoming Events



24th ANNUAL CAREER AND EDUCATION DAY **Saturday, January 9th at 8:00 a.m.**

The Houston Hispanic Forum invites all students in grades 6 through 12 and their parents to attend Career and Education Day at 8:00 a.m. on Saturday, January 9th at the George Brown Convention Center. Get the facts about student loans and grants. Learn about career choices, college selection and application. Complete the FAFSA form online. It's all FREE at Career Day. Call 713-522-8077 or go to www.hispanicforum.org for details.



WESTSIDE SALUTES AMERICA

Tuesday, November 10 at 7:00 pm

The Westside High School Music Department is proud to present its second annual Veterans Day concert to honor the heroes of the armed forces and instill patriotism in our community. Band, Choir and Orchestra will feature large and small ensemble pieces all centered on an American theme, and Westside ROTC will be prominently featured throughout the evening. However, this is not your usual concert! Rather than simply watching and hearing the concert, the audience will enjoy performances by over 300 students happening all around them with lots of surprises in store for our families, friends and community!

Prior to the concert, Westside Music Boosters will host a fundraising dinner in the Commons. Information about the dinner can be found in the Music Department, in the WHS Main Office, or on the band website (www.wolfband.org).

Please make plans to attend this patriotic and memorable event!

WESTSIDE ALUMNI BREAKFAST

Thursday, January 7th at 8:30 a.m.

Mark your calendars for the third annual Alumni Breakfast to be held Thursday, January 7th, in the WHS Library at 8:30 a.m. Reconnect with former classmates. Watch the website and weekly newsletter for more details. Anyone interested in bringing baked goods, please email judydthompson@gmail.com.





WEST-SIDE PROUD





It's a new school year, do you know where your students are?

By: Cathy McDonnell, PTO President

Most likely your student is still on campus, at tutorials, practice or organizing a club activity. The diversity of activities and interests at Westside High School are sometimes astounding. Students just held a "clubs" rush week in September, where they had the opportunity to learn about all kinds of activities offered on campus and given a chance to join. With more than 40 clubs and organizations represented, every one of our students should be able to find something of interest.

Many of our students are involved in one or more of the 17 sports we offer here. They have practice or games several times per week. School spirit shows as students turn out to support our teams. Others are involved in student government, service work, ROTC or social activities. And of course there are the many Fine Arts programs and our Culinary Arts program. There are also the activities that surround some of our specialized studies such as Environmental Science, Health Sciences, Business Entrepreneurship, the Engineering program. All in all, our kids are busy. As I meet various students in my work as PTO President, I am constantly impressed by their dedication to task and their ability to juggle it all, along with their studies.

That means that we as parents are busy keeping up with them, right? I know I was excited to find Parent Student Connect (PSC) up and running at the end of September. The program is everything that was promised and easy to use. Parents and students can check grades, attendance, assignments and more. This terrific tool is available to everyone at Westside. If you haven't used it yet, sign on

and take a look around, you will be glad you did. Next, make sure your student knows how to use this tool as well.

Be sure to take a look into the future as well. We have enhanced our college center – come and visit! Sign on to PrepHQ and stay informed about which schools are coming to visit and when, and new scholarship application opportunities. College Night, held October 14, was a success, with at least 100 schools visiting. It is never too early to attend, and if you missed it, be sure to check in with our College Center to gather the materials you need.

High School can be a great experience for those who choose to get involved, in any way that suits them. Parents are the support that keeps them going. Thanks for all you do, especially through PTO involvement, to provide our students with the opportunities they deserve, and to provide our terrific staff with the assistance they need.

President
Cathy McDonnell

1st VP-Membership
Christie Petrie

**2nd VP-
Fundraising**
Kiki Hummel

Treasurer
Kelly Simmons

**Recording
Secretary**
Debbie Noriega

**Corresponding
Secretary**
Janna Wright

VIPS
Shelby Doehring
Rhonda Monteverde

Parliamentarian
Kelly Cramer

We're on the Web!
www.westsidepto.org

PTO MEETINGS

**First Tuesday of Every Month
7 p.m., Library**

**November 3
January 12**

Are you receiving the weekly e-News from Westside High School?

By: Ms. Diana Baron

Westside High School is making every effort to sign up all parents (students, too) to our list serve so they will receive our weekly newsletter and the occasional important bulletins from the school administration.

By now, you should be receiving the weekly WHS electronic Newsletter if you gave us your email on the Communication Form in your First Day Packet. If you have not been added to our distribution list serve, you can subscribe by (1) using the link on our homepage in the first announcement, OR (2) send an email to dbaron@houstonisd.org with "add to list serve" in the subject line. Some of the handwriting was difficult to read so we may have incorrectly entered your email address.

If you wish to unsubscribe from the e-News, go the same link on our homepage and follow the instructions or send an email with "remove from list serve" in the subject line.

PARENTS, TEACHERS AND STAFF WHS PTO NEEDS YOU!

By: Chirstie Petrie, VP Membership

So far we have had 405 parents and staff join the WHS PTO this year. That is a great start!

Our goal is to reach 600 members this year! Your membership includes a student directory and "W" car decal and supports many important activities at WHS.

Last year the PTO provided two new flat screen TV's in the Commons, Direct TV service to classrooms, supplemental funding for academic departments, facility improvements and landscaping. In addition, the PTO sponsored the Back-To-School Bash, Homecoming Dance, College Night, several Teacher/Staff Appreciation events and awarded \$12,000 in scholarships to graduating seniors.

Remember, you must be a member of the PTO, if your child plans to apply for the PTO Spirit Scholarship. Please complete the membership form which can be found at www.westsidepto.org/forms and return it with your check to the office. It's a great investment in your child's education. Or complete the membership form found on page 12 and mail the form with payment to Westside HS, 14201 Briar Forest Dr., Houston, TX 77077, Attn: PTO Membership.

PTO Appreciates Our WHS Staff!!

By: Cathy McDonnell, PTO President



WHS PTO hosted a staff appreciation luncheon for all "houses" or small schools on Friday, October 16th. Coordinator Narda Weierbach organized the lasagna, salad, bread and dessert lunch with the help of PTO house representatives and their volunteers. Staff enjoyed lunch in the comfort of their own teacher lounges and the PTO was able to say thanks on behalf of all WHS parents for the great staff work being done so far this year. Three more similar events will be held during the year, along with some other special thank yous as well.

Ivan Espinosa represents Westside on Mayor's Youth Council

By: Ms. Marcy Baez, Dean

Mayor Bill White has renewed the Mayor's Youth Council (MYC) started in 1998. The MYC provides high school students the opportunity to develop leadership and citizenship skills while learning about city government. We are pleased to announce that Westside student **Ivan Espinosa** has been selected to serve on the Council.

Ivan was nominated by Media Relations & Law Dean **Marcy Baez**. He will attend regular meetings in the City Council Chambers at City Hall and participate in various community service projects and special events throughout the year. Members are also called upon to help make decisions affecting Houston's youth.



Our congratulations go to Ivan and **Victoria Ellington** who was a finalist out of more than 400 nominated for the Council !

Wolves On The Move to Help "Race for a Cure"

By: Ms. Mary Maneen

These are just some of the Westside Wolves who participated in the Komen



Race for a Cure on Sat. October 9, 2009. Our group team exceeded

thirty-five & provided great representation of our school joining St. John's, St. Agnes, & Cinco Ranch to name a few. It was a worthwhile opportunity as members of our group were directly touched by the support & power of the Komen fight for breast cancer. We hope this group will continue to build in numbers so the Westside spirit is felt in the community. Way to go Wolves!!!



Bottom row: L – R Becky Brune, Alyson Carralez, Christina Valencia, Emily Hansen, Michelle Bilby, Morgan Ball & Lauren Coleman
Top row: L – R Caroline Adams, Cassie Maneen, Leah Rosenzweig, Hasmig Hannessian, Mastoreh Hakim & Jodie McDonald

WHS Dancers Compete at US

Open Swing Championships

Congratulations to East 2 student **Victoria Elington** and her brother **Trey** ('09 WHS Grad) who will be dancing at the US Open Swing Dance Championships. This is the oldest and largest National Swing Dance competition of the year and attracts international dancers as well as those from the United States. Tori and Trey have been dancing for 4 years and are competing in the young adult division of the competition which will be held in Anaheim, California over Thanksgiving weekend. Tori is a *Houston Chronicle* intern (recently named an editor!) and Co-President of the Westside Debate Team.

WHS Student at Stanford University

By: Ms. Erin Williams



Westside HS Senior, Sebastian Siverand, was chosen as one of 300 high school scholars from 26 different countries to attend the prestigious Stanford High School Summer College.

Applicants were chosen based on SAT scores, GPA, application, essays, recommendations and personal achievement.

Sebastian was awarded a partial scholarship and lived on campus during the summer, attending college classes for credit alongside Stanford undergraduates. The classes he took at Stanford were Philosophy, Social Psychology, Advanced Tennis and Working Smart. His passion is music. He composes music and write lyrics. . He is also in choir, plays piano and saxophone. Congratulations, Sebastian!



Millionaire's Club Celebrates Reading



Westside High School students **Diana McCall** (right) and **James Wallace** (left) wear their HISD

Millionaire Club t-shirts to celebrate all the great books they read over the summer.

Library Summer Reading Program Coordinator **Debi Schroen** (center) organized the Houston ISD initiative at Westside. The Millionaire Club is a coordinated effort by the Department of Library Services, the "Literacy Leads the Way" initiative, and the Reading Department to keep HISD students reading over the summer months.

Students who read at least five books in June, July, and August submitted a reading log documenting their efforts and were awarded a t-shirt and encouraged to wear it on Friday, September 25, Millionaire Club Day in HISD. From among the many students who participated, Diana and James also won a drawing and received tickets to a Houston Dynamos game.

Westside High School

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The *Westside Wire* is published by Westside High School PTO as a vehicle to inform parents and the community of happenings we think you may find of interest. Information for publication comes from Westside Staff and the PTO Board. Questions or comments can be sent to smanks@aol.com.

Susan Manks, Editor
smanks@aol.com

Environmentally Sound

By: Ms. Carolyn Klein

Conservation!



Ecology Club and SAVE jumped into action by participating in National Parkland Conservation Day at Memorial Park on Saturday, September 26. Forty-four members of

the two clubs teamed up to help in the morning with park maintenance guided by the Memorial Park Conservation Society. Afterwards, club members enjoyed a picnic lunch in the park, complete with frisbee and roasted hot dogs. A special thanks to Chris Sperry, Nancy Khun and Bryan Hill for joining in as co-sponsors.



Bayou Bound

The AP Environmental Science classes will be gathering water quality data on Buffalo Bayou at Highway 6 this year to share with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality through the Texas River Watch program. Small groups of students will visit the



Bayou twice monthly after school to collect pH, dissolved oxygen, conductivity and visual observations to monitor the health of the bayou. The TCEQ gets reliable data to monitor water health, and the WHS AP Environmental Science students get an opportunity to gather significant real world data. Getting outside is always fun, and the students are exploring their local ecosystems.

It's An Invasion...



Texas is being invaded by aliens and the Environmental Systems classes are here to help! Many species which have been brought accidentally or purposefully to Texas have become problems and are known as invasive or alien species. Examples are fire ants, Chinese tallow trees, and the grass carp fish. The Environmental Systems classes are joining the Invasive Species Project this year to monitor and remove some of the invasives around Terry Hershey Park. The students have already been practicing plant identification in the WHS Ecological Preserve and will put their skills to use this fall and spring. In Terry Hershey park, students will use cameras to document locations and extents of invasive plants and work to remove the plants to help the native growth thrive. In the spring, they will return to the same areas to determine the success of their work and to plant more natives.



The Howler goes Green

By: Mr. Taylor Winzler

Our school newspaper, the *Howler*, has stepped up to the demands of its readers and is now on the web! It is posted on Word Press, which is similar to a blog but modeled after the latest trend for high school newspapers---going green. The newspaper staff writes articles in class, and the advisers do the final editing and publishing. The students write articles about the latest happenings at Westside as well as local and national news. One of the advantages of this format is that articles are published in a timelier manner than a standard newspaper. Our hats off to Editor **Taylor Winzler** and all the staff writers!

Check out the *Howler* at <http://westsidehowler.wordpress.com/>.

Westside High School PTO, Staff and Teachers extend a wish to the entire Westside High School family for a happy and safe holiday season!



Westside Wire

Students Together Achieving Results

By: Mr. Brian Hanson



Westside, like all high schools, has a diverse population. We tend to think of ethnicity or socio-economic position but teens are different in so many ways. Their talents, grades, interests, family, political views, etc. make them unique. Sometimes, it is simply their behavior that sets them apart.

In HISD, the Behavior Adjustment Class (BAC) provides a nurturing environment to assist students who need a smaller school setting and assistance with understanding and following rules. Thanks to the innovation of teacher **Brian Hanson**, Westside's BAC is now the S.T.A.R. Program (Students Together Achieving Results). What's in a name? Apparently, quite a bit. "We choose to go with the name S.T.A.R. Program because it is more positive and uplifting for our students," explains Mr. Hanson. But what sets this class apart from many of its kind is what he does beyond the norm. Earlier this year, his students entered the "I Won't Cheat" essay contest and the class won tickets to a Houston Astro's game. The kids were thrilled with the opportunity to go to a ball game, a new experience for many.

Along with being rewarded for their efforts, the program places great emphasis on giving back to the community and works on many service projects throughout the year. They've just begun volunteering with Habitat for Humanity, the non-profit organization that builds safe and affordable homes for those in need. With this project, the students are not just giving back but are also learning a trade at the same time. They are already looking forward to volunteering at the soup kitchen and Thanksgiving Family Dinner with more to come. Together, they are indeed achieving results.

Special thanks to the following individuals for contributing photographs for use in the Wire:

Ms. Patch
Ms. Baez
Ms. Carolyn Klein
Kelly Simmons
Diana Baron
Cathy McDonnell
Katy Wicker

IMPORTANT DATES



REPORT CARDS

November 18

January 13



SATURDAY TUTORIALS

8 a.m., Commons

November 7

November 14

December 5

December 12

January 16

January 23

NO SCHOOL

November 25-29

December 21-January 4

Westside Speech and Debate

The WHS Speech and Debate Team has started off the school year strong. At the Houston Independent School District Tournament, **Diamond Gallow** placed third in the Lincoln Douglass Debate, and **Nkosi James** placed sixth in Humorous Interpretation. By the time you read this, we will have attended both the Alief Hasting and Bellaire tournaments.

WHS also participated in the Houston Urban Debate League (HUDL) seminar in October. The mission of the Houston Urban Debate League is to build, support, and sustain programs in Houston's public schools to make policy debate an educational resource available to all students. Policy debate prepares students to be effective advocates for their selves, their families, and their community. The HUDL builds public-private partnerships that enhance the investment of school districts in debate activities and holds seminars to teach new debaters the basics of developing cases, writing cards (which is creating packet of evidence to support cases), and other foundations the student might have missed out on in the club or class.

The official Westside High School Debate Team meetings are on Mondays right after school in room E231. Debate coaches Ms. Davis and Ms. Pham are available Monday through Thursday after school; students who cannot make the time after school can stop by during lunch.

Debate is aiming for new heights at Westside. The Wolves are ruling the podium and showing the other schools who's boss.

Superior Performance

By: Ms. Kelly Porter



Despite the rain, the Westside Marching Band and Pride Dance Team received Division I Superior Ratings at the Central Texas Marching Showcase in Round Rock, Texas on Saturday October 3rd. The Superior Ratings at this Pre-UIL Contest reflect the hard work and dedication of these students. Congratulations to the Band and Pride!



HOMECOMING 2009



Westside

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WESTSIDE HIGH SCHOOL
Houston Independent School District
4400 West 18th Street
Houston, TX 77092-8501

PTO Membership Form 2009-2010

Parent's Name:

Parent's Name:

Street

City:

Zip:

Email Address:

Home Phone:

Cell Phone:

Business Phone:

Westside Student's Name:

Grade Level

Dean/Small School

1.

2.

3.

I'm Interested in PTO Volunteering Opportunities ___Yes

YES, I WANT TO JOIN THE PTO for 2009-2010 \$50 Leader of the Pack \$20 Family \$10 WHS Faculty/Staff

Yes, I would like to contribute to PTO College Scholarship Fund \$10 \$25 \$50 \$75 \$100 Other

Yes, I would like an extra copy(ies) _____ of the Student directory at \$5.00 each (or 2 for \$9)

Yes, I would like to have the Westside Wire emailed to me rather than delivered via U.S. Postal Service

Amount Enclosed \$ **(Payable to "WHS PTO")** **Check #:**

Return completed form with payment to: Westside HS, 14201 Briar Forest Dr., Houston, TX 77077, Attn: PTO Membership