



WISS STRONG ALL IN THIS TOGETHER

Annual Report to the Community • 2019-2020 School Year



A Note to Our Community

If there is one word to sum up the 2019-2020 school year, it is “unprecedented.” Although school began and operated as usual for six and a half months, what we will all remember is the last three months. Beginning on March 13, 2020, our students, staff, families and community entered uncharted territory as we were directed by the Governor’s office to close schools and stay at home to combat the spread of COVID-19.

Not many people, if any at all in our community, experienced anything like this before. We immediately had to adjust and adapt to a surreal environment, responding to a pandemic that changed the educational landscape along with every other aspect of our lives. It was, and may continue to be for the remainder of 2020 and in 2021, the most difficult challenge we will ever face. But, what we learned throughout this upheaval and ongoing transition, is that we have an amazing community that demonstrates great strength and unity AND we should all be proud.

In the months that followed the closure of schools, our staff, students and families worked together to navigate the unfamiliar and establish new ways of teaching and learning to complete the school year. Notably, we also learned new ways to take care of ourselves and each other – reinforcing our school district’s shared values of providing academic excellence AND character development to empower each student to excel to their fullest potential and contribute in full measure to the greater community.

In this year’s Annual Report, we are pleased to share some of the inspiring ways our community responded to the pandemic with intelligence, strength, creativity, kindness and resilience. Their positive actions and attitudes resulted in productive and meaningful outcomes that not only helped us end the 2019-20 school year successfully, but helped prepare for an uncertain future.

One thing is certain: no matter what the 2020-21 school year and beyond bring to the Wissahickon community, **we are strong and we are all in this together.**

Joseph Antonio
School Board President

Dr. James A. Crisfield
Superintendent

Our Mission

The mission of the Wissahickon School District – a learning community rich in diversity and committed to academic excellence and character development – is to empower each student to excel to their fullest potential and contribute in full measure to the greater community.

WSD Shared Values

We believe that our students...
will be individuals of character.
will be knowledgeable members of the community.
will be effective communicators.
will be collaborators.
will be innovators.
will be critical thinkers.
will be civic-minded citizens.
will be self-aware individuals.

2019-2020 School Board of Directors



Pictured left to right
(front row): Tracie Walsh, Vice President, Ronnie Hayman, Joseph Antonio, President, Marshall Bleefeld; (back row) Zeffy Karagiannakis, Paul Badger, Amy Ginsburg, Ron Stoloff and David Frank

WSD Administration

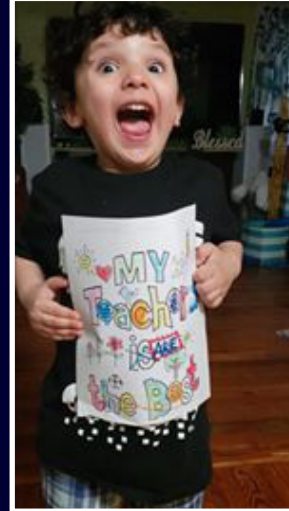
Dr. James A. Crisfield, *Superintendent*
Gary Abbamont, *Assistant Superintendent*
Wade Coleman, *Business Manager*
Cathy Rossi, *Director of Personnel*

TOGETHER: We Stayed Connected While We Were Apart



One of the most difficult parts of schools being closed and the stay at home orders was the overnight loss of face to face contact with friends, classmates, teachers, coaches and other staff.

Wiss Nation immediately jumped on efforts to build connections virtually.



WISSAHICKON SILVER LININGS

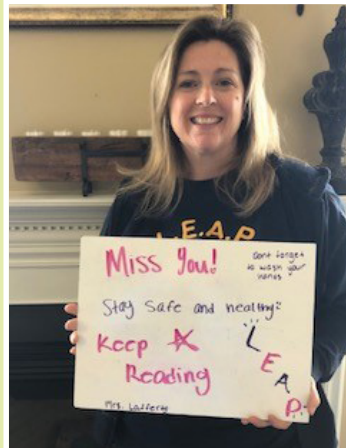
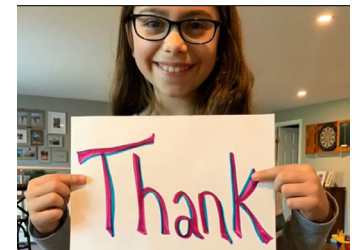


WISS NATION'S
UPLIFTING & UPWORTHY
WEEKLY ROUNDUP



Here Are Just a Few Ways We Connected:

- 🍏 Demonstrating the adage that every cloud has a silver lining, Wiss Nation embraced a weekly newsletter, *Wissahickon Silver Linings*, that shared the uplifting and upworthy news happening across the district. Beginning in early April, staff, families and students shared photos, videos and stories about their at home activities.
- 🍏 While students are typically encouraged to spend less time on social media, these platforms became a lifeline to connect with their friends and loved ones and have fun. From sharing pictures of our at home adventures to posting Tik-Toks of our staff dancing, we found ways to make each other smile.
- 🍏 Our staff and students weren't shy about letting each other know how much we missed each other. In fact, during Teacher Appreciation Week, our amazing parents and students let our teachers know how important they are and how much they were missed by sending and posting pictures with homemade signs and video shoutouts.



TOGETHER: We Embarked on a Virtual Journey

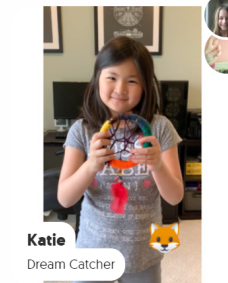
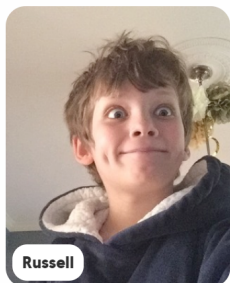
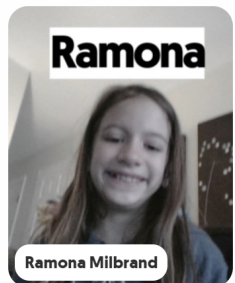
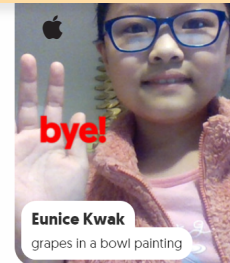
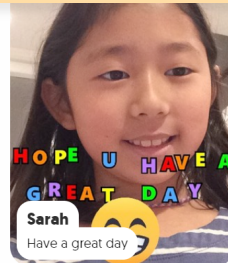
On March 13, 2020, our normal school routine was suddenly upended, challenging our school community to embark on a virtual journey where teaching and learning left the confines of the brick and mortar classroom for that of a virtual classroom. In very short order, the school district team was tasked with creating an At Home Learning Plan to meet the diverse learning needs of nearly 5,000 students in a totally different environment that needed to be flexible enough to meet the many needs of our families. Indeed, the challenges associated with this transition were daunting, but in true Wiss Nation fashion, our entire learning community embraced the challenge and worked together to explore this virtual world, both from the perspective of the teacher and the learner. All of this, of course, happening in the midst of a pandemic that had everyone rethinking every one of life's details and had all of us adjusting to a very new world.

Over the course of the late spring, the district provided a range of professional development sessions focused on the digital tech tools that would be needed to deliver a remote teaching and learning program. With each passing week, more and more tools were introduced and teachers planned lessons for their students that could be flexibly completed as the family's schedule would allow. As time moved along, teachers began to explore the more synchronous teaching and learning opportunities. Clearly, this was a time of new learning for all of us — students, parents, and teachers.

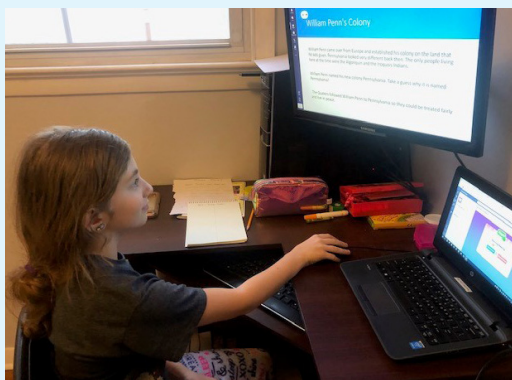


Here are some highlights of the At Home Learning Plan:

- 🍏 WSD took advantage of the learning management and collaboration tools already embedded in the district and familiar to students and staff. Lessons and assignments were posted in OneNote for elementary students and Schoology for secondary students along with specially designed learning materials.
- 🍏 At the beginning of the quarantine, most class lessons were designed asynchronously (not a live interaction with the teacher) to provide families as much flexibility as possible when scheduling their child's day. Students could complete homework in the morning, afternoon or evening. Some teachers expanded to synchronous lessons (live video conferencing lessons) beginning in April as well.



- Teachers flexed their creative thinking to craft lesson plans and activities to help students practice and reinforce previously taught skills, content, and concepts AND learn new content in new and engaging ways. Tools including Office 365, Microsoft Teams, Flipgrid and Seesaw allowed students to work collaboratively on assignments and post their work to share with others in the class.
- Teachers worked hard to establish a sense of normalcy for students by keeping some activities that take place in the “real” classroom. At Blue Bell Elementary, for instance, teachers took turns hosting a virtual morning meeting, which is typically held in elementary classrooms to start each school day.
- Teachers created lessons that allowed students to take advantage of being at home (e.g. doing things in their backyard or neighborhood for a science lesson).
- Students and families were invited to set up meetings during the virtual office hours with teachers and counselors to support their specific needs during the quarantine.
- In elementary schools, students posted videos for various assignments and watched the videos that other students posted — a great way to see each other’s work while being apart. Teachers also connected students with experts around the community and world via Skype.
- Students were encouraged to explore new hobbies and focus on learning things that typically get put on the back burner due to lack of time in our busy lives. Some students reported learning a new instrument, trying new sports activities, reading more books — even learning a new language!
- Music and art teachers held virtual exhibitions and concerts with students demonstrating their talent by sharing videos and photographs.
- Extracurricular club advisers and student leaders altered their activities to allow their club members to stay engaged with each other through Zoom and other video conferencing tools.
- Student competitions, including the popular Reading Olympics, MathCounts, and Robotics competitions continued in virtual settings.



“Teaching and Learning took on a whole new appearance in the spring of 2020. From the brick and mortar classroom to that of the virtual classroom, our students and teachers were thrust into a very new learning environment. While there were challenges in this transition, our students, parents, and teachers came together to explore these new ways of teaching and learning. As different as this new learning environment is, I am both impressed and appreciative of our community’s commitment in ensuring that Wissahickon’s educational program continues to be a source of great pride for all of us.”

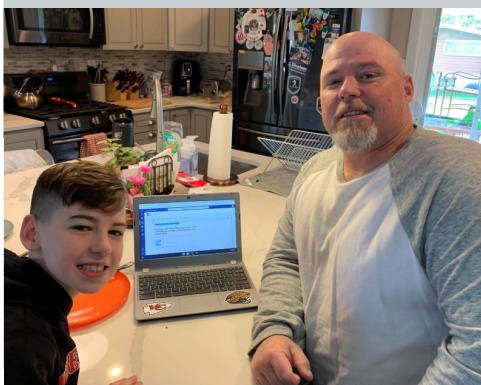
Dr. Gary Abbamont, Assistant Superintendent and Director of Curriculum and Instruction



TOGETHER: Parents & Teachers Formed a Critical Link

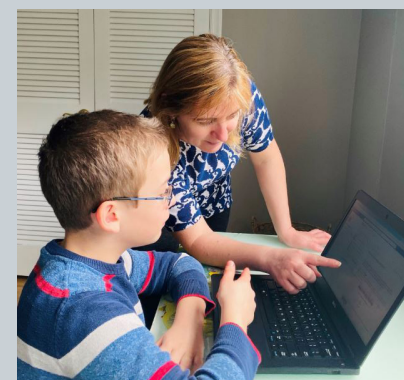
In a traditional school year, parents play an invaluable role in their child's education. During our school closure, that role dramatically expanded with parents becoming full-time educational partners with their child's teacher to help oversee instruction and assist with homework — all while continuing to manage their own jobs and other responsibilities.

Working together, we formed that critical link, making the difficult shift to at home learning. We converted our kitchens, living rooms and bedrooms to offices and classrooms with dining room tables, counters (even pets!) serving as desks. Parents logged in to the district's online learning resource center to view lessons and support their child with homework.



"My Stony Creek families were amazing during our remote learning in the spring! The partnership that we shared was incredible. Our virtual learning would not have been as successful without the dedication of our parents. When teachers and parents support one another, the child sees that we are all in this together. It truly is a team when we work together."

Tishara O'Brien, Stony Creek 4th Grade Teacher



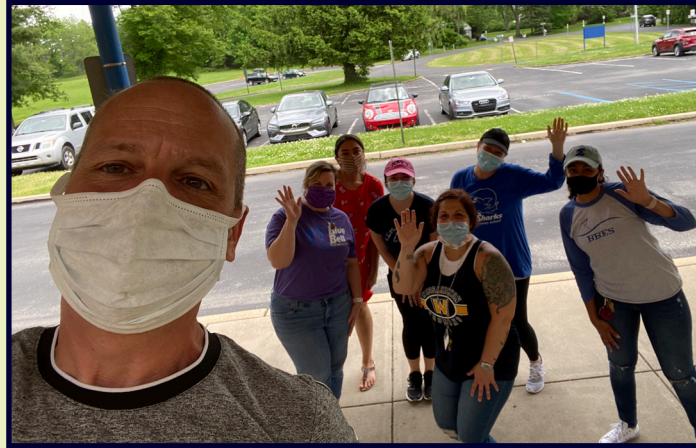
Quarantine Gave Us Bonus Time with our Family

As part of a Health and Physical Education assignment, middle school students were asked to reflect on some of the positive outcomes of quarantine and what they hope stays the same after the pandemic. It was no surprise that many students enjoyed the extra time with their family and doing fun activities together!

"My family and I have been spending more time with each other by playing board games, playing on virtual sports, and even baking together. When our life goes back to normal, I want to keep that special bond because we usually don't have that much time together when we have physical school. We had some good laughs while playing/baking, and I have really enjoyed it! We even invented new games/things to do as well! During this time, I have learned more about myself and other people, and I think that will affect me in the future as well, in a good way!"

Wissahickon Middle School Student

TOGETHER: We Protected Ourselves, Our Family and Our Community



Our students, staff and community quickly learned that in order to slow the spread of COVID-19 and protect ourselves, our family, friends and neighbors, we had to comply with new health and safety guidelines. We are proud that Wiss Nation did our part — following stay at home orders, practicing social distancing, wearing face masks, washing our hands regularly and taking other precautions.

During the nationwide shortage of face masks, Wissahickon students also demonstrated kindness and civic responsibility. Eliana Gigliotti, LGE second grader, made more than 100 children's masks for Horsham Clinic where her mother works after learning that there was a shortage of masks that fit children. Eliana even taught her father to sew! WMS students, Anika Rastogi and Alisa Puenpatom, made masks for Temple Hospital and Doylestown Hospital and senior Olivia Holtzinger made hundreds of headbands for nurses to make their masks more comfortable.

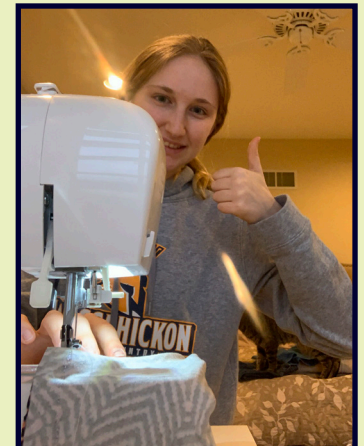
"As a senior, I felt like I was capable of making a difference. Once I started, I couldn't stop and I ended up sewing 101 headbands to help nurses around the country. Although my back may hurt for a few days, it's incomparable to that of healthcare workers and I'm just glad that I could help and make this time a little easier for people who are caring for patients every day."

WHS Senior Olivia Holtzinger



"Stay on task and wear your mask! It is very important because they help keep kids safe from diseases that are caught by sneezes and coughs. Be smart and do your part. Wash your hands, don't touch your face and wear your mask!"

Eliana Gigliotti, 2nd Grade
Lower Gwynedd Elementary



TOGETHER: We Created New Traditions

A nontraditional year, requiring social distancing through the end of school, called for the creation of new traditions to celebrate the educational achievements of our students. In place of our normal in-person ceremonies, we brought our community together through safer outdoor activities and virtual celebrations.

Students, staff and families participated in car parades where we demonstrated our Wiss Nation spirit with great car decorations, costumes, music, dancing and a lot of cheering.

Our Home and School Associations organized special shoutouts for our staff and students, providing packaged goodies during the car parades and pickup events.

Families joined together to watch videos of our 5th and 8th grade promotions, Senior Awards, Scholarship Night and Commencement for the Class of 2020, which aired on the district cable channel and YouTube.



"WMS Dads" – Mr. Harry Mobley & Mr. Brendan Hill – hosted a successful online games celebration for 8th graders. Participants were grouped into teams of 10 for a scavenger hunt, trivia and other games.



"What a wonderful promotion day it turned out to be for our 5th grade Blue Sharks! It was so great how all the BBES teachers, staff, and parents came together to create such an amazing car parade for our graduates. We are all so thankful that the kids were able to end this crazy year with such fun memories...and I have a feeling that this might just be a tradition that everyone will want to continue for years to come!"

Mary Beth Perry, BBE Parent



CLASS OF 2020



CAR PARADE JUNE 4, 2020



Class of 2020 Highlights

Wiss Nation is proud of the Class of 2020 during this unprecedented school year. Despite the loss of so many important activities and events associated with their senior year, they demonstrated resilience and maturity, joining together to provide support and comfort to their fellow classmates while completing their final year of school.

These graduates had the unique distinction of being the first WHS class to celebrate commencement virtually, along with other end-of-year ceremonies such as Senior Awards and Scholarship Night. They were also the first class to hold a car parade through Ambler — an event that involved community members across the district. Students, staff and families from every school cheered on the seniors as they drove by in their decorated cars — a much deserved celebration for an amazing group of students.

“Although the pandemic had stripped away many of the senior traditions every student looked forward to, it also provided the opportunity to invent and enjoy new activities. In a time of seclusion Wiss Nation created unity in the form of a car parade. As I looked out my car window, I saw not only the coming together of students and teachers from all grades, but also the wider community. Neighbors with no connection to seniors came out of their homes simply to congratulate me and my classmates; police and road crew waved and gave a thumbs up as we passed by — an experience I would never have received otherwise. Wiss Nation was able to take the hand it was dealt, and create something meaningful and unforgettable.”

WHS Senior Sydney Goodman

Post Secondary Plans

357 Number of Graduates

74% Four-year college

21% Two-year college/trade/technical school

4% Gap Year, Work or other opportunities

1% Military

111 Number of Colleges Students are Attending



TOGETHER: We Supported Those in Need and We Spread Kindness

The closure of schools across the nation also meant the disruption of important programs, such as the Free and Reduced School Breakfast and Lunch Program, that provide regular nutritious meals for students whose families struggle financially. At WSD, 22% of our families rely on this program. Working closely with our community partner, Mattie Dixon Community Cupboard, and the district's food service vendor, the Nutrition Group, staff and volunteers quickly mobilized to set up a Grab and Go Program at two locations to provide no-charge breakfast/lunch two days a week.

Community members also stepped up to support those in need with financial and food donations. WHS football students, coaches and families collected over \$2,000 and over 100 bags of groceries to support Mattie Dixon and our community bought Wiss Strong/All in This Together apparel through an online store, raising \$1,000 for the cupboard.

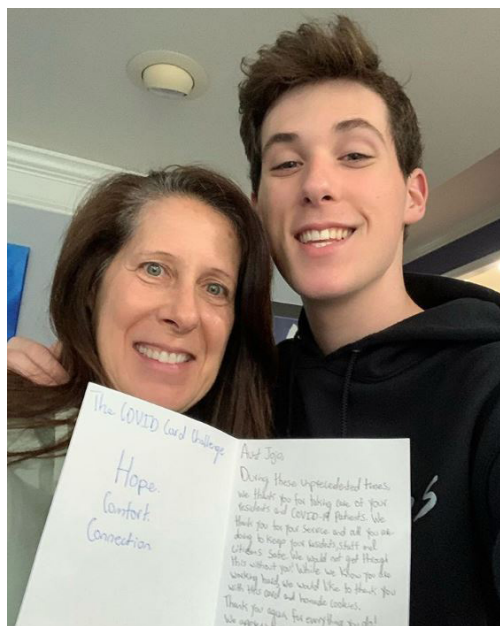
The shift to virtual learning was also more difficult for families without adequate access to technology. While the school district is fortunate to have a 21st century teaching and learning plan that provides a laptop to every student in grades 6 to 12, elementary students did not have a district-issued laptop and many families had no computer in the home at all. Additionally, not all families had internet access to accommodate online learning. Within several weeks, the district again mobilized to distribute 500 additional computers to families in need and help our families get connected to free or low-cost internet.

Staffed by a combination of food service workers, district staff and volunteers, Wissahickon provided 11,000 breakfasts and 11,000 no-charge bag lunches to district families in need.

What I Learned in Quarantine

"Out of all the things I have done, I realized that I'm actually caring about others a lot more. Before the pandemic, I used to never really care about others too much and thinking 'well, that's not happening to me, so why should I care? Not my problem!' which I know is really mean and selfish. But, I learned that what happens to others can affect me too, so I hope me caring about others continues after this is all over."

Wissahickon Middle School Student



To spread joy and comfort to those afflicted with COVID-19 and to the healthcare workers who put their lives on the line every day, six 11th grade students created the COVID Card Challenge — a platform that allows community members to send a card to a COVID-19 patient or a healthcare worker at any hospital or facility of your choice.

The students challenged Wiss Nation to write 600 cards to help "Build Hope, Comfort, and Connection One Card at a Time." The students created a website (www.cardchallenge.org), a promotional video, Facebook and Instagram pages to spread the word.

"The COVID Card Challenge is built on three words: Hope, Comfort, and Communication. We want COVID-19 patients to know that they are loved and that Wiss Nation is supporting them in their recovery. More so, we want healthcare workers to know how appreciative Wiss Nation is for all their hard work during this time and that they have so much support from all of us."

WHS Junior Jake Kelly, Founder of the COVID Card Challenge

SNAPSHOT: 2020-2021 School District Budget

\$107 Million
Total Budget

21.12
Millage Rate

2.58%
Property Tax Increase

\$129
Annual property tax increase
for a household with a
median assessed value of
\$207,000

Where the Money Goes

67% Classroom Instruction Expenses
Teachers & Assistants, Textbooks, Materials, Supplies

28% Classroom Support Expenses
Student Services, Guidance, Library, Curriculum
Development, Transportation, Health Services,
Nursing, Technology, Operational Leadership
Administration, Business Office, Maintenance,
Community Relations, Human Resources, Utilities

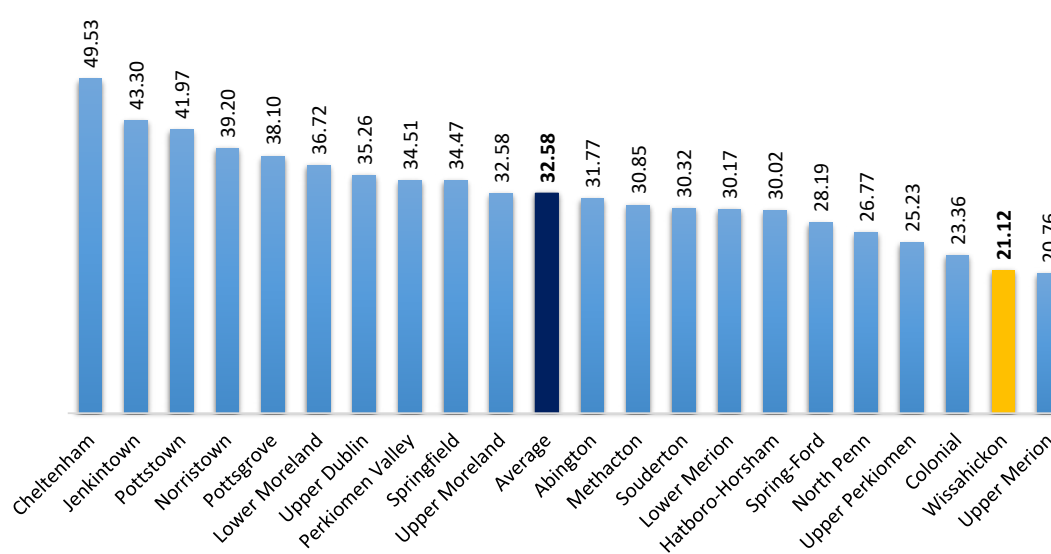
3% Noninstructional Services
Student Activities, Community Services

2% Other Expenditures and Financing Uses
Debt Services, Fund Transfers

District Fast Facts: 2019-2020

STUDENTS	Total Enrollment	4,870
	Minority Enrollment	38%
	Economically Disadvantaged	22%
FACULTY	Special Education	19%
	Number of Faculty	370
	% with Master's Degree	84%
	Average Years of Teaching Experience	13.8

Montgomery County School District Millage Rates 2020-21



*Property taxes in
Wissahickon are
well below the
average and second
lowest among
the 21 districts
in Montgomery
County.*

*(To calculate your property tax,
multiply the assessment of your
property by the millage rate and
divide by 1,000)*



Wissahickon Pride

U.S. News and World Report 2020 ranked Wissahickon High School #1 BEST HIGH SCHOOL in Montgomery County and #8 best in the state (#5 compared to public high schools only, with magnet schools removed). WHS was also named among the region's top 40 high schools by *Philadelphia Magazine*.



INSIDE:

We invite you to read how our school community responded to an unprecedented school year, demonstrating that we are Wiss Strong and All in This Together!



Wissahickon School District
601 Knight Road
Ambler, PA 19002

Nonprofit Organization
US POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO. 4
SOUTHEASTERN, PA

Stay Connected

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WHS Alumni Facebook: facebook.com/Wissahickonalumni

Watch us on YouTube or WTV: Comcast 28/ Verizon 41

Follow Us on Twitter: @WissahickonSD

Follow Us on Instagram: @wissahickonschooldistrict

Download our Free Mobile App: Search Wissahickon School District in the App Store/Google Play.

Subscribe to the Wiss Nation Quarterly e-news: Click the link on the wsdweb.org homepage.

WHS Athletics: Follow athletic news at wissahickonathletics.org. Sign up for text and email alerts for scores, schedules and news.

Senior Gold Card: Residents, ages 62 and older, receive FREE entrance to home athletic events. Email communications@wsdweb.org for your gold card.