

WISS NATION



Annual Report to the Community 2021-2022 School Year



INSIDE:

We invite you to read how our school community focused on creating a sense of belonging where all students feel welcome, connected, and valued.

A Note to Our Community

As we reflect on the 2021–2022 school year, there is so much to be proud of and thankful for as we returned to a traditional school setting following more than a year of radically modified teaching and learning due to COVID–19. This year reinforced that there is no educational model that even comes close to matching the benefits of full–time, in–person learning.

At the same time, this year was not without significant challenges. The ongoing disruption of traditional school/work/daily activities and routines due to the pandemic, coupled with economic, political and social turmoil, resulted in personal and professional difficulties for community members – not only in Wissahickon, but across the nation and world. Students and staff returned to the classroom carrying the baggage of many life–altering changes, academic setbacks and emotional trauma.

As we moved forward and reflected on our mission, vision and values, we knew it was critical to focus on fostering equity and inclusion in our schools and promoting a culture of BELONGING where all students, staff and community feel appreciated, accepted, validated and supported as we worked to restore relationships, school routines, and academic and social emotional competencies.

Simply put, BELONGING is a prerequisite for student learning and growth, and we fail our students, academically and otherwise, if they do not feel as though they are valued and belong in Wissahickon schools.

In this Annual Report, we highlight this important work, which will continue to be a top priority in the future. We hope you enjoy learning more about its many benefits through a selection of stories and comments by our staff, students and families. Promoting a culture of BELONGING at Wissahickon truly underpins everything we do in education.

Dr. James Crisfield
Superintendent

Amy Ginsburg
School Board President

To learn more about our Belonging programs, we invite you to view the dedicated section of our website at www.wsdweb.org/about-wsd/belonging

2021-2022 School Board of Directors



Pictured left to right (front row): Back row, left to right: Marshall Bleefeld, Board President Amy Ginsburg, Zeffy Karagiannakis, Rosetta Chiavacci; Front row: Vice President Joe Antonio, Ronnie Hayman, Deanne Morris and David Frank. *Not pictured:* Paul Badger

WSD Administration

Dr. James A. Crisfield, *Superintendent*

Dr. Mwenyewe Dawan, *Assistant Superintendent*

Wade Coleman, *Business Manager*

Danielle Hey, *Human Resources*



Alex Gindea and Morgan Wilson served as two of the four student representatives on the WSD School Board. In this role, they provide the School Board and Administration with the student perspective on topics that impact our school community and are critical participants in our efforts to ensure all students are seen and heard.

What is School Belonging?

Noun: experiencing appreciation, validation, acceptance, and fair treatment within an environment (adapted from Cobb & Krownapple, 2019). School belonging can include a sense of affiliation with the school, relationships within the school environment, including authentic relationships with peers and staff, and a student's perceptions and feelings about school.

Why is Belonging Important?

Research shows that students who have a strong sense of belonging have **greater academic achievement**, are **more engaged and motivated** in school, and have **improved physical and emotional health**. These conclusions don't apply to a select few –they extend to students of all ages, income levels, ethnic and racial backgrounds, geography, and gender.



To what extent do students and staff feel a sense of belonging in our school community?

The answer to this important question was evaluated this year via a Belonging Climate survey (The Psychological School Sense Membership Scale – Goodenow, 1993) administered to staff and students.

Information gathered from the confidential survey was used to direct next steps in professional learning, social-emotional lessons, and our ongoing efforts in equity and cultural responsiveness. Students and staff will complete the climate survey annually to monitor our growth in creating a sense of belonging in our school community.



Mia Owusu-Antwi, Class of 2022, was one of four students who volunteered to work with administrators, teachers and community members on developing and implementing programs that will nurture a culture of belonging.

“As a student representative on the District Equity Planning Committee, I ensure that our student voice is heard and our perspective is considered by contributing my ideas to the committee’s action plans. I worked on a subcommittee that helped develop the Belonging Climate survey and we are excited to use this to help everyone in the school to feel more accepted and welcome.”

How Do We Promote a Sense of Belonging?

Cultivating a culture of belonging is the responsibility of all stakeholders in a school community: administrators, teachers, counselors, support staff, families, community partners and students themselves.

We are proud to share examples of how all of these members of our school community contributed during the 2021-2022 school year.



The District's Comprehensive Planning Process for 2022-2025 was steered by three essential groups – Leadership Council (pictured above), the District Equity Planning Committee, and the Board's Racial Equity Oversight Committee. These three groups represent a diversity of stakeholders – students, parents/guardians, staff, administration, Board of Directors, and community members – who are instrumental in designing the district's programs and instructional practices to support equity and inclusion and a culture of belonging.

We Reinforce Our District Commitment

To reinforce the district's commitment to providing a culture of belonging, the WSD School Board approved revised vision, mission, and shared values statements as part of the Comprehensive Plan 2022–2025. Required every three years by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, the Comprehensive Plan identifies priorities and action plans to help districts focus on continuous improvements in leadership, teaching, and learning.

The revised statements further highlight the district's commitment to valuing belongingness, diversity, equity, and inclusion. Additionally, the revised shared values align with social-emotional learning competencies.

Our Vision

“Belong, Inspire, Engage, Excel”

A learning community where all students and staff feel a sense of belonging and are inspired to engage and excel to their fullest potential.

Our Mission

The mission of the Wissahickon School District – a learning community where diversity is valued, and equity is an ongoing commitment – is to empower each student and staff member to excel to their fullest potential and meaningfully contribute to the greater community.

Shared Values

We believe all students and staff will...

- develop healthy identities
- value diversity and inclusivity
- maintain positive relationships
- feel and show empathy for others
- achieve personal and collective goals
- make responsible and caring decisions
- contribute to safe and just communities

We Hire and Support our Staff with a Focus on Belonging

Developing staff capacity, skills, and mindsets around creating a culture of belonging in our schools is critical to success. The district's multi-year professional development commitment for our staff continues to focus on promoting equitable environments and outcomes that support ALL students' social, emotional, mental, behavioral, and academic needs. This year's efforts were supported by the district's first Director of Equity and Cultural Responsiveness, Keziah La Torre, in collaboration with Jen Schmidt, Director of Teaching and Learning. District-wide learning sessions included:

- 🍏 **Culturally Responsive Teaching:** using students' customs, characteristics, experiences, and perspectives as tools for better classroom instruction
- 🍏 **Trauma Informed Care:** using a practice that recognizes the prevalence of adverse and traumatic childhood experiences and equips teachers and staff with knowledge to recognize trauma and strategies to support students who experience trauma
- 🍏 **Social Emotional Learning (SEL):** building student competencies in social emotional skills such as responsible decision-making, relationship skills, self-management, social awareness and self-awareness
- 🍏 **Restorative Practices:** using a framework to address conflict through empowerment, honesty, respect, healing, acknowledgement and personal accountability, collaboration, and problem-solving

We Prioritize Social Emotional Learning (SEL) in Our Instructional Strategies

In the classroom, teachers supported students' academic growth while nurturing social and emotional needs through instructional strategies including:

- Second chance learning that gives students the opportunity to revise their work to learn the material
- Discussions to amplify our students' voice and choice, which improves engagement
- Reflection and feedback sessions
- Team-building exercises

Wayde Craig, 4th Grader at Shady Grove, enjoys the team activities during their monthly SELebration.

"I learn that we get a lot more done when we work together and that anything is possible."



"Social Emotional Learning is the cornerstone for promoting a classroom community where students feel seen, included and safe. It frees them to communicate, collaborate, take risks, make mistakes, and problem-solve. Students who feel validated will perform at their very best."

Lynn Riviello, Justin Alvare, and Salina Talley
Lower Gwynedd Elementary Second Grade Teachers

SEL Activities In All Schools

Every school incorporates social emotional learning (SEL) in classroom lessons and activities as well as school-wide events.

- ★ Shady Grove holds a monthly SELebration where the entire school community participates in fun activities that build SEL skills such as communication, teamwork and conflict resolution
- ★ Stony Creek "SEL"ebrates students making good choices with a monthly spotlight recognizing one student per classroom for being kind, respectful and hard-working
- ★ Lower Gwynedd holds Schoolwide Town Hall Meetings focused on a L.E.A.P. skill (Listen, Empathize, Appreciate and Persevere)
- ★ Blue Bell organizes Community Building Friday activities
- ★ WMS celebrates students who exhibit the 3Rs – Respect, Responsibility and Relationships
- ★ WHS offers peer mentoring opportunities and intervention/enrichment (IE) classes on mindfulness and self-management strategies

PERCENT ENROLLMENT BY STUDENT GROUP

Students from Low Income Households	19.5%
Students of Color	38%
Students with Individualized Education Plans	19%

PERCENT ENROLLMENT BY GENDER

Male	51.9%
Female	48.1%

PERCENT ENROLLMENT BY RACE/ETHNICITY

2 or More Races	7.31%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	.04%
Asian	15.49%
Black	9.32%
Hispanic	6.33%
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	.10%
White	61.40%

We Recognize and Celebrate Differences

The need to belong is universal; however, students who have been historically marginalized or underrepresented may be less likely to feel they belong. As a community, rich in diversity, Wissahickon focuses efforts on recognizing and celebrating all cultures, experiences and belief systems.

Our teachers work to connect activities and learning to students' backgrounds, interests, and prior knowledge in authentic ways such as choosing literature that reflects our students culturally, racially, and socioeconomically.

Throughout the school year, all schools also recognize a variety of holidays, heritage months and cultural events to help our students develop a deeper understanding of their own and other people's cultures, while broadening their perspectives and increasing awareness.

"Culturally responsive teaching has been beneficial to me and my students. I've really had the chance to implement it in different types of social studies lessons and create themes and activities for events such as the Lunar New Year and Black History Month. It got me acclimated in understanding different students' backgrounds and cultures and gave me the opportunity to allow them to share their experiences, which I think is awesome!"



Sean Stovall
WMS Social Studies Teacher



During National Hispanic Heritage Month, students learn about the history, culture, contributions and influence of the Hispanic community.

Our schools organize presentations by parents and grandparents who share information about different customs and cultures.



Our Students Share the Benefits of Belonging

Promoting a sense of belonging in school means creating an environment where **every student** believes they have the support of staff who really care about their success.

Our staff strive to be clear and explicit with students to let them know that they belong, that they are supported, and have the ability to succeed. Through class and personal discussions where teachers set expectations and provide constructive, goal-directed feedback, to the provision of lessons that allow students to share their voice and be actively engaged in learning, our staff show students they care.

Read the comments from students in the Class of 2022 written to a WSD teacher about how their relationship made a difference in the way they feel about school and themselves:



"Whenever I needed to talk to someone, you were always there for me and I appreciate that. We have had heartfelt conversations that have changed my whole perspective and outlook on life. Every day I came to your class, it gave me so much energy. It's typically the highlight of my day."

Chase Bethea to Carolyn Popovic
WHS German/French Teacher



"It was the atmosphere and vibe that you created in the classroom that really changed how I viewed school. I remember thinking for the first time that I was smarter than I thought. That change in attitude stayed with me throughout my middle and high school career."

Ella Saunders to Nicole Bowlby
Shady Grove Elementary



Gabby Veney took advantage of the WHS Social Lab which provides seniors the opportunity to earn academic credit for their work in a career setting. Gabby chose an internship with Lower Gwynedd Elementary teacher, Kerri Young, to learn about being a teacher.

"On the first day of my internship you welcomed me with open arms. Being in your classroom where I could just be myself really helped me. I don't think I've ever been so comfortable in the classroom. It just made me feel like I belong."

Gabby Veney to Kerri Young, Lower Gwynedd Elementary



"Your class was one of the reasons why I looked forward to going to school. You helped foster a community that made class gratifying. Being able to have a positive balance - between learning the required curriculum, while also doing it in an engaging way through the activities we did - in addition to the energy that you brought to the classroom every day, helped engage me and others. It is something I am still thankful for!"

Mihran Alshamry to Jeff Slanina, WHS Spanish Teacher

How do Our Students Promote Belonging in Our Schools?

Understanding the need to feel understood, seen, accepted and appreciated, our students embrace opportunities to celebrate diversity and promote inclusion and a sense of belonging in their schools.

Through different events and programs, community service and extracurricular activities, students use their unique interests, perspectives and strengths to connect with one another and improve the school experience.

The Indian Cultural Association, a new student club, and CASA (Celebrating All Students' Achievements) are just two of many extracurricular clubs at WHS that students may join to meet new friends with different backgrounds and interests. This year, our clubs organized a variety of events and activities that raised awareness of other cultures and brought the community together.

"The Indian Cultural Association is a really fun way to get people involved in the community and learn about cultures that we might not get to learn about in school otherwise."

Anoosha Shukla, Junior and Cofounder/Secretary of Indian Cultural Association



Celebrating All Students' Achievements (CASA)



The WMS Student council hosted a door decorating contest with the themes of inclusivity and belonging. The motivational messages of support for the entire community was really inspiring!



Indian Cultural Association

"There are a lot of great opportunities for students to get involved in, like clubs and leadership activities. One in particular is CASA, a club where we host different multicultural events and we discuss current important issues. I feel this helps make our school more welcoming and inclusive for everyone."

Aaron Rouse, Junior

Nurturing Belonging through Mentoring



Secondary Mentorship Program

Understanding the power of mentorship, the district partnered with leaders from the Kappa Alpha Psi, Inc. Guide Right Leadership program to provide 11 training sessions for targeted 7th graders – some of whom will serve as future peer mentors. Students were taught leadership, relationship, communication and decision-making skills.

“I learned to respect everyone, be a leader, and always stand up and do the right thing if people around you are doing something wrong. I also learned to sit up and listen to the teachers. As a student, this helped me get my grades up. It made going to school more fun and I enjoyed it.”

Evan Drabick, 8th Grade



“We’re There When You Need Us.” That’s the motto of the dedicated students in the WHS Wiss Link – 80 WHS student leaders and four advisors who are trained as mentors to help incoming freshmen with a successful transition to high school. Now in its fourth year, Wiss Link hosts special events and activities to support freshmen with navigating social and academic challenges.



SPOTLIGHT: Connection between WHS and Shady Grove



“We really wanted to create bonds with the students and create a bridge between us!”

Talia Roizman, WHS Student

During the 2020–21 school year, five WHS students – Talia Roizman, Clare Kelly, Gabby Jones, Charlotte Zager and Katie Fath – decided they wanted to connect with students in another school to reinforce that we are all one community. The girls decided to create social emotional learning lessons for 5th graders from Shady Grove (where they attended) to help them prepare for middle school.

Mr. Opper’s class was selected and the WHS students began mentoring the students via Teams. “We created Power Points about different life lessons – being kind to everyone, being a good sport, how to prepare for middle school – and to give our advice because when it comes from other kids, other students really listen,” Talia said.

This school year, the WHS students journeyed to Shady Grove to meet Mr. Opper’s class in person! “I really liked meeting this group of girls and liked their lessons. We learned a lot about socializing and decision-making and we had fun,” said 5th Grader Lilian Hartkorn.

How do our Families Promote Belonging?

Our families are critical partners in supporting an inclusive school environment and creating a community where everyone feels a sense of belonging.

This year, our parents/guardians supported our students and staff by:

- 🍏 volunteering to organize and participate in school-wide events and celebrations that bring the community together, such as family fun nights, staff appreciation luncheons and fundraisers that help enhance learning and the school experience
- 🍏 providing their time, resources and expertise for classroom presentations, activities and after-school programs
- 🍏 sharing their perspective via school board meetings, community conversations, discussions/meetings with teachers and administrators, surveys, focus groups and committee participation

SPOTLIGHT: Parents, Students & Staff Working Together

Katy Oh, WSD parent, describes herself as an accidental activist. She, along with other Asian American parents and community members, wanted to get more involved to help students who may be feeling anxious and fearful following acts of violence and discrimination across the nation directed at the Asian community.

Oh formed an Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) parent group in May 2021. “We came together to talk about concerns, but we didn’t really know how to contribute and partner with the school,” Oh said.

Oh started by speaking at a school board meeting and met with district leadership and teachers to build a rapport and discuss ways to recognize and celebrate AAPI students and families.

A project was developed to support the purchase of books with an AAPI theme and to incent students at Blue Bell Elementary to win one of the books by doing a project for AAPI Heritage Month. Oh’s group also supported the WHS Asian Student Association (ASA) which organized the first WHS Asian Culture Fair, supported by the whole community.

Now, with membership growing, Oh is excited to do other activities with the schools and would like to see the celebrations extended all year round.



Every school has a Home and School Association with committed volunteers who organize events to bring the school community together. This year, Stony Creek HSA hosted family events including a Water Ice Social, Breakfast Buddies and a Trunk or Treat for Halloween. They also supported school events like Stony Slam (staff vs. student basketball game) and Field Day.

“We were able to hold events over the course of this entire year and that made our Stony Community only stronger this year. It was incredibly exciting to see families back together and volunteering at fun events.”

Michele McKeown and Stephanie Levinson, HSA officers



“We felt it was so important to reassure our community that they belong and wanted our kids to feel like they can be themselves.”

Katy Oh, WSD Parent

Welcoming New Families

As a highly desirable community to work and raise a family, Wissahickon continues to welcome new families to the district. To accommodate our growing enrollment, the district completed the first phase of the school expansion project at Stony Creek Elementary and approved a design plan to accommodate the projected enrollment growth at Blue Bell Elementary in the coming years.

The Stony Creek community celebrated the Grand Opening of their new addition in December, which included additional classrooms, an expanded multipurpose room and a new, specially designed space for the Autistic Support Program, previously located at Shady Grove Elementary.

During the final phase of construction in the 2022–23 school year, the cafeteria and stage will be dismantled for the library renovation and all classrooms will get new HVAC units.

With an anticipated increase of 110 more students at Blue Bell Elementary in the next several years, the district reviewed and approved a three-year construction project that will increase classrooms, the core capacity of school (a large multipurpose space for lunch, gym, etc.), on-site parking and space for a car line, and maintain a sufficient outdoor recess area.



New Addition at Stony Creek Elementary School

- 26,000 square feet of new construction
- Multipurpose room (cafeteria/gymnasium/auditorium with stage)
- Six classrooms and a music room
- Specially designed spaces for the Autistic Support Program
- Expanded parking areas for special events
- Lengthened access drive to improve car line traffic
- New central plant

THANK YOU!

Breslin Architects
D'Huy Engineering
Whitpain Township

2021-22 Student Enrollment



Districtwide
4,976



Blue Bell Elementary
494



Lower Gwynedd Elementary
620



Shady Grove Elementary
652



Stony Creek Elementary
587



Wissahickon Middle School
1,111



Wissahickon High School
1,347

WSD Explores Change in School Start/End Times

In light of scientific research on the benefits of later school start times for adolescents (e.g. improved concentration, mood, behavior, decreased tardiness and car accident rates), coupled with positive feedback from other districts that have recently implemented later start times, the WSD School Board and Administration began the process of examining options for possible implementation in Wissahickon schools for the 2023–24 school year.

During the 2022–23 school year, the district will provide the community with detailed options that include flipping schedules for the elementary and secondary schools or moving start times back at all schools. The district will convene focus groups and seek feedback from the entire community via surveys given to staff, parents, and students.

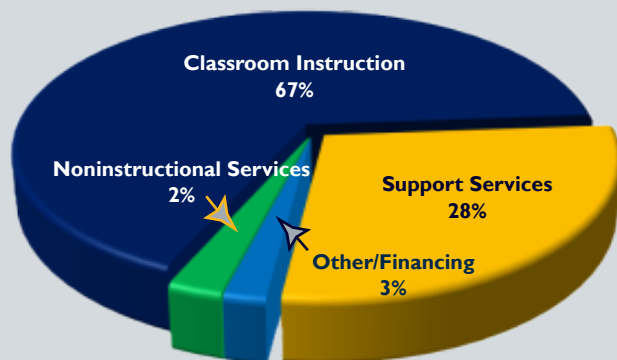
To learn more about this initiative, visit
www.wsdweb.org/about-wsd/district-initiatives

SNAPSHOT: 2022-2023 School District Budget

Wissahickon School District
601 Knight Road
Ambler, PA 19002

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

Where the Money Goes



\$115 Million

Total Budget

22.45

Millage Rate

3.37%

Property Tax Increase

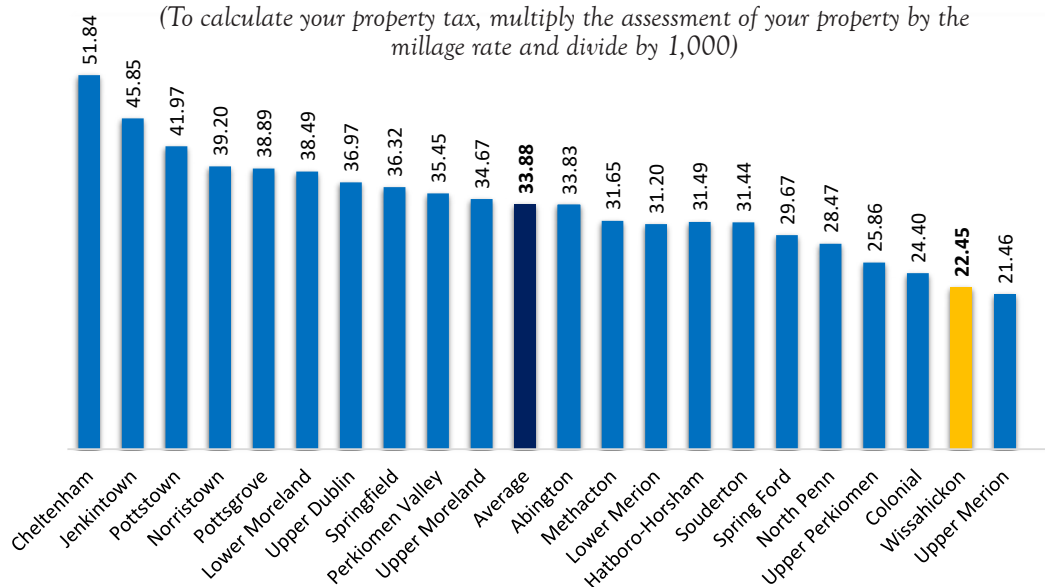
\$154

Annual property tax increase
for a household with a median
assessed value of \$209,820

Montgomery County School District Millage Rates 2022-23

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)



Our Community: We All Belong

There are many ways community members can get involved with our schools and support our students:

- 🍏 Volunteer in our Schools
- 🍏 Be a Career Day Speaker or Class Presenter
- 🍏 Provide a Business Internship
- 🍏 Join our Alumni Network
- 🍏 Sponsor our Programs, Teams & Clubs
- 🍏 Attend School & Athletic Events (**FREE** for residents 62 and over with a WSD Gold Card)
- 🍏 Support WEOF - our Education Foundation - weof.org
- 🍏 Subscribe to Wiss Watch - our monthly e-newsletter at wsdweb.org
- 🍏 Follow Us on Social Media

Email communications@wsdweb.org for more information!

