

# LET'S BE REAL

October 2025



## A MESSAGE FROM MARK

Welcome to October and to our newsletter!

Please don't forget to take some time to recognize the beauty of this season. Many things seem dark, but the leaves are gorgeous. They symbolize the beauty of change! The changing of season in Illinois is something I cherish.

Our theme, "Let's Be Real," is the perfect topic for this point in time. Many of you know that October is when our Illinois School Report Cards are released to the public full of data and information about our local schools and districts. These report cards include data that foster conversations about how we are doing, what we can celebrate and where we can get better. This is a great tool for "being real" with our communities.



As a government entity, West40 persists at being transparent and open with our many constituencies. We work with other Government entities, school districts, community organizations, faith-based entities, service providers and many more. To be truly effective and stronger together, we must build relationships of trust. Trust is built by being open and communicating well. West40 prides itself in modeling this kind of transparency. Communication and sharing lead to trust, which fosters strong relationships. **We know that we are stronger together!** So we honor these relationships with transparency and collaboration.

At a time in history where many are questioning the role of Government, we intend for West40 to show out as a model of integrity, compassion and efficient operations. Everything we do is to "change the world one life at a time." That is the reason we set the bar so high and are always working to be better!

Have a wonderful October!

## Your District Families Want More Information

If your district regularly celebrates student and school successes through social media and other storytelling platforms, keep up the great work. But are you holding back on communicating stories that your stakeholders want to know more about?

The National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) gathered feedback from parents, staff, and community members nationwide about how school districts communicate, including strengths and opportunities for improvement. According to NSPRA, aggregated data from its proprietary SCOPE Survey™ reveal stakeholders often feel less informed about:



- **District Finances**
- **District Plans and Goals**
- **Leadership Decisions**

In other words, survey results indicate that districts can be more transparent. NSPRA says there are ways you can make this process easier through teamwork.

“Transparency around district finances, goals and leadership decisions starts with collaboration,” said Alyssa Teribury, Communication Research Manager for NSPRA. “When school leaders and communicators collaborate across departments—such as with a school business official—they can translate complex information into clear, accessible messages that help families and community members understand how decisions are made and why they matter.”

The release of the Illinois School Report Cards later this month will provide an opportunity for districts to tell their stories and share how they plan to improve. The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) has information on its website that can assist districts in identifying their target audiences and crafting messages that explain what report card data says about strengths and areas for growth. Learn more: <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/How-to-Tell-Your-Summative-Designation-2025.pdf>

## Keeping You Informed about West40's Investments

West40 is driven by our mission to serve students far beyond graduation and we don't give up easily in finding various ways to fund programs and projects to support students and families, in addition to the funding we receive from the state and the services we provide.



Recently, West40 purchased an embroidery machine as part of our employability program. The \$63,000 machine was funded through a grant. Additionally, West40's Food Mart continues to keep its food mart stocked with food thanks in part to a partnership with the Greater Chicago Food Depository. We also serve hot meals through a partnership with Chi Care.

West40 continues to seek new funding sources in its monumental plan to transform the former St. Joseph High School in Westchester into a state-of-the-art residential school for children in foster care. To date, West40 has used approximately \$13 million from a combination of its general funds and state grant funding on the purchase and renovation of the St. Joseph campus. Included in these expenditures has been the demolition of the north building and the addition of a new HVAC system in the south building. While West40 is waiting for updates from the state, planning for renovations continues and we are seeking alternative funding sources.

## West40 Partner District Spotlight

### Ridgewood HS Students Perform CPR to Help Save Friend's Life

Imagine being a teenager and seeing your friend collapse while on a jog. What would you do and how would you react?

Four Ridgewood High School juniors experienced this in July when Nick Hunt suffered a cardiac arrest on the Des Plaines River Trail. Nick's friends' quick-thinking kicked-in and they performed CPR on him until paramedics arrived.

Illinois state law requires all high school students complete CPR training before graduation. This video story highlights why learning life-saving measures is SO important! Thank you to Nick, RJ, Jerome, and Frank for sharing your story.

#### Students Help SAVE Friend's Life with CPR Skills Learned in School



STUDENTS HELP SAVE FRIEND'S  
LIFE WITH CPR SKILLS LEARNED  
IN SCHOOL

# West40 Area Schools Achieve Blue Ribbon Status



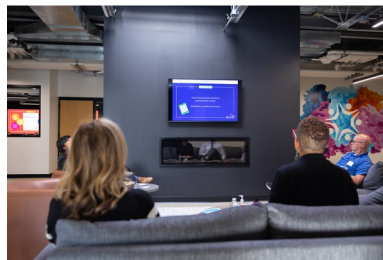
Three schools in the West Cook County area were named 2025 Illinois Governor's Blue Ribbon Schools. They include Pleasantdale Middle School of District 107, Highlands Elementary School of District 106, and Lyons Township High School of District 204.

The Governor's Blue Ribbon School Award program honors public and private K-12 schools with exemplary academic performance. The program was established by the U.S. Department of Education in 1982 and ran until August. Now Illinois will continue the recognition using the same criteria as the former nationally-run program, which includes assessment results, student subgroup performance, and accountability status.

Congratulations to all of the students and school staff for this remarkable achievement!

## Inaugural Open House Builds Strong Connections

West40 held its first Open House for our district partners on September 22. Nearly thirty representatives from sixteen districts across the West40 region participated. The Open House served as an opportunity for us to highlight our core services, including student programs, professional development, and comprehensive educational services. Attendees also learned how West40's communications, community resources, and grants departments can support their work.



"The West40 Open House was all about connection. It was a great opportunity to meet new faces, listen to what's happening in their districts, and share the many ways we can partner to make an impact," said Justin Gonzalez, West40 Director of Innovation.

Thank you to everyone who attended!

## School Safety Conference Sets Attendance Record

The Illinois School Safety Conference, organized by West40 and its partners, welcomed approximately 800 attendees to the White Eagle Events & Convention Center in Niles on October

1st. Each year the event brings together national experts, public safety officers, and educators to collaborate on real solutions to make learning environments safe for everyone.

This year's conference featured keynote speakers First Sergeant Matt Eversmann (US Army, Retired), immortalized in the film *Black Hawk Down* and Commander Scott Byrd of the Metropolitan Police Department of Nashville and Davidson County. Commander Byrd shared lessons learned on the preparation, training, and response from The Covenant School shooting.

West40 School Safety and Threat Assessment Specialist Randy Braverman helped start the Illinois School Safety Conference twenty years ago.

Portions of this year's conference were made accessible to watch via live stream on the West40 website. We would like to thank all of the attendees, speakers, vendors, sponsors, and partner hosts of the event.

## Helpful Noteables and Reminders

### Professional Learning Opportunities

West40 offers professional learning opportunities called Administrator Academies that equip local school leaders with practical skills, current research, and shared learning experiences that strengthen leadership, improve student outcomes, and build stronger schools and communities. Additionally, our Empower ED professional development sessions are designed specially for educator specialists. There's still time to register for sessions taking place on October 31st.

[View Administrator Academies](#)

[View Oct. 31st Empower ED Sessions](#)



**West40 Communications Department**

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