

Forward Thinking

April 2025

A Message from Mark

West40 has always believed that education is a lifelong journey. That means our commitment to a student doesn't end with a diploma. Our transitional programs, wraparound services, and partnerships with local agencies and post-secondary institutions allow us to build pathways to help students succeed long after they leave the classroom!

And we celebrate our district partners who provide wonderful opportunities for students to explore career options while they are still in high school. Workforce development programs introduce young adults to a world of post-graduation possibilities, including in-demand jobs in the fields of education, manufacturing, healthcare, the trades, and much more.



WE SUPPORT



Fulfilling the
Promise
of Public
Education

As we move deeper into 2025, West40 continues to align our mission and work with Vision 2030, the bold initiative embraced by multiple organizations across Illinois to ensure every student is prepared for success in college, career, and life. This vision challenges all of us to think beyond the traditional boundaries of education. It calls on schools and communities to provide meaningful support not just during a student's time in the classroom, but well after the final bell rings on graduation day.

We are reimagining what it means to "graduate"—focusing not only on completion, but on helping students access higher education, job training, stable housing, and mental health care. Through our

alternative learning opportunity programs, McKinney-Vento supports, and our upcoming efforts aligned with Vision 2030, we are ensuring that our students are seen, supported, and set up for lasting success.

Warmly,

Mark A. Klaisner

Students at West40 Area High Schools Get Head Start on Possible Careers



Photo Courtesy: Andrew Ciolek

A Focus on Career and Technical Education Programs

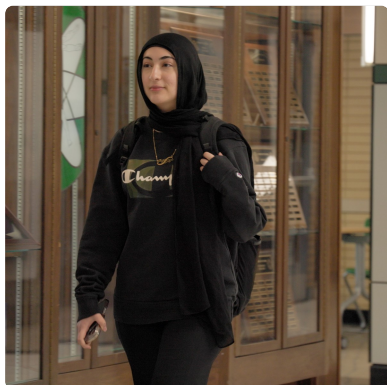
Ridgewood High School senior Andrew Ciolek protects the quarterback and opens lanes for running backs as an offensive lineman on the football field. As he nears the end of his time in high school and prepares to play football in college, Ciolek is already getting ready for a possible career as a first responder.

"I like the health care stuff. I like to know what to do if there's a problem and nobody else knows what to do. I like to feel that I'm confident in my own skills, I'm confident in myself that I can help the situation," Ciolek said.

As of early 2025, Ciolek attends high school by day and takes an emergency medical technician training course two nights a week at nearby Triton College.

"With this opportunity, money's not coming out of my pocket to pay for something like this, which is beneficial," Ciolek said.

Ridgewood's career pathways program offers more than twenty endorsement areas for students to explore, including health care, manufacturing, teaching and more.



Ridgewood Senior Majd Mousa completed the education pathway program and received dual credits from Northeastern Illinois University.

"If you like working with kids or anything with school, like social worker, counselor, even principal, or teachers, it's definitely the program that you need to try," Mousa said.

The career pathways program is designed to be as flexible as possible and could lead to a paid internship or job offer at the end, according to Ridgewood superintendent Dr. Jennifer Kelsall.

According to Illinois State Board of Education records:

> **285,000**

Illinois high school students enrolled in career and technical education courses during the 2023-24 school year.

≈ **48%**

of all high school students

654/700

high schools and all 25 area career centers offered approved programs



Roy Zuniga graduated from Elmwood Park High School in 2024. While still in high school, Zuniga participated in an EMT program at Technology Center of Dupage.

"It basically means I get to explore new career opportunities and jobs that I wouldn't have expected to be wanted to be interested in," Zuniga said in a video originally published by Elmwood Park High School.

Elmwood Park High School's college and career counselor, Paige Kozyra, said these hands-on programs allow students to see their own potential, build confidence, and build skills.

Meanwhile, students said good time management is needed to balance their school work with the training programs. But it gets them one step closer to certification in the field they choose to pursue.

"I'm just looking forward to building on my skill set and just becoming a successful person in life," Ciolek said. "Having a successful career, having the resources to do so, having the network of people to do so and just be able to support my community."

West40 has released an extended article on this topic, as well as a video and a podcast, which can be found on our [West40: A Closer Look website](#).

School District Communicators Share Best Practices at West40 Comms Network



Police and firefighters are outside your school. Phones are ringing off the hook. Social media chatter is going in multiple directions. The media is knocking on your door.

The above hypothetical situation is something all school district administrators and communications professionals may have to deal with at one time or another. That's why West40 started its Communications Network as a way to gather area school PR professionals under one roof to share best practices and hear from guest presenters.

West40 hosted its first communications network workshop on February 27. It focused on the importance of building relationships with first responders before a crisis. Our next workshop is scheduled for May 5 from 9am - 11am and will feature tips from recently retired Chicago TV journalists on pitching stories to local news outlets and preparing for scheduled and last-minute interview requests. We have limited spots available if you are interested. To register, click [here](#).

The Early Impact of Kindergarten through Third Grade ALOP

West40 now provides individualized support to students between Kindergarten and Third Grade at six area schools with the recent expansion of our Alternative Learning Opportunities Program (ALOP) model. This pilot program is possible thanks to a special waiver granted by the State of Illinois.

At Lincoln Elementary in District 89, for example, 32 students in grades K-3 are currently enrolled in ALOP. There is also a waiting list with more families hoping to join.



West40 student advocates focus on social-emotional development and relationship-building.

"Our advocate helps our students find their voice, believe in themselves, and build healthier relationships so they can be successful in and out of school," said Yadira Gomez-Munoz, principal at Lincoln Elementary.

Other West40 area partner schools participating in K-3 ALOP include Union Ridge School, Congress Park School, Melrose Park Elementary, Garfield Elementary, and Washington Dual Language Academy.

West40 Celebrates Students at SCOTY Awards and Supports Scholastic Contests

We continue to honor students who impact their schools and communities through excellence, resilience and leadership. Through our School Citizen of the Year (SCOTY) Awards, festivals and the scholastic competitions we support, West40 provides opportunities for students to learn academically, build self-confidence, and strengthen teamwork skills. [READ MORE HERE.](#)



Update on West40's Advocacy Efforts in Springfield

West40 recently testified in support of a bill that would amend funding for safe schools. While the future of HB1599 remains unclear, we are hopeful that leadership will include the content of the bill in the Budget Implementation Bill in late May. HB1599 replaces antiquated grant formula elements and provides that in any fiscal year in which the State funding allocation is at or above \$22,730,000, each Regional Safe Schools Program shall receive \$100,000 for that fiscal year (instead of receiving funding in the amount of \$30,000), plus an amount based on the ratio of an educational service region's or the Chicago public school system's average student enrollment (instead of best 3 months' average daily attendance in grades pre-kindergarten through 12) to the statewide totals of these amounts.

**Best 3-mth.
Avg. Daily
Attendance**

TO

**Avg. Student
Enrollment**

And in any year in which the allocation for the grant is at or above \$22,730,000

CURRENT
\$30,000
per school

TO

PROPOSED
\$100,000
per school



**Greater stability in funding from year
to year and better service to students**

Dine Out with West40 Cooks to Support the West40 Education Foundation!



The non-profit West40 Education Foundation is excited to invite you to its first major event - West40 Cooks! This fundraiser will take place at the East Leyden High School student cafeteria on Saturday, April 26 from 5:00 to 7:30 PM.

Tickets range from \$25 to \$50 and can be purchased at the door or in advance [HERE](#). Learn more about sponsoring the event or volunteer your culinary skills by registering [HERE](#).

For any questions, please contact John Butts, Executive Director of the Education Foundation (NFP), at 630-888-8701.

The West40 Education Foundation is dedicated to uplifting students and their families by providing resources and support to help them overcome challenges that get in the way of a chance for success. Our mission is to ensure every student has the opportunity to thrive, regardless of their circumstances. Learn more at www.west40educationfoundation.org.

Upcoming Events and Reminders

Administrator Academies

AA4025: AI in Action: A Leader's Guide to Implementation - revised 6/25/24

- Apr. 24, 2025, 8:30 AM - 2:30 PM

Participants will evaluate the current level of usage of artificial intelligence in their building/district by students and staff; synthesize strategies for how to develop a collaborative culture that promotes the effective use of AI; assess AI-powered tools to ensure they are safe, equitable, and promote student engagement; and critique AI tools to ensure they are unbiased and equitable to enhance learning in all students.

[REGISTER HERE](#)

AA2001: Illinois Performance Evaluation - Teacher Evaluation Training (ONLINE)

- May 13, 2025 - May 15, 2025, 8:30 AM - 4:30 PM

This two-day academy is designed for individuals who are seeking initial training qualifications for teacher evaluation. This academy aligns with the competencies for Part 50, Section 50.420 (a-b).

[REGISTER HERE](#)

Reminders

Does your educator license expire in 2025? Be sure to log into your ELIS account and renew it by June 30th to keep it valid for employment. Licensure renewal information can be found through the following link. <https://www.isbe.net/Pages/Educator-Renewal.aspx>

If you have any licensure questions or concerns, please reach out to the West40 Licensure Department at licensure@west40.org

APRIL 2025 - Begin amended budget preparations - [CLICK HERE FOR ISBE BUDGET PAGE](#)

Reserve a consultation with the West40 Communications Team regarding possible video productions, graphic designs, and/or other communications support. [CLICK HERE TO LEARN MORE](#)



West40 Communications Department

West40 is using Smore to create beautiful newsletters