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A MESSAGE FROM MARK



(Click on the video above for a message from West40 Exec. Director Dr. Mark Klaisner)

HIGH SCHOOLS TRAINING FUTURE TEACHERS

Second graders at Pleasantdale Elementary sit with legs crossed and listen intently as high school junior Renee Letourneau reads aloud from a children's alphabet book about the nation's capital.

"So far they always get so excited when I walk in the room and they've drawn me pictures. It's really nice so far," Letourneau said.

As a participant in the Lyons Township High School teacher internship program, Letourneau spends nearly four hours each week in the second grade classroom.

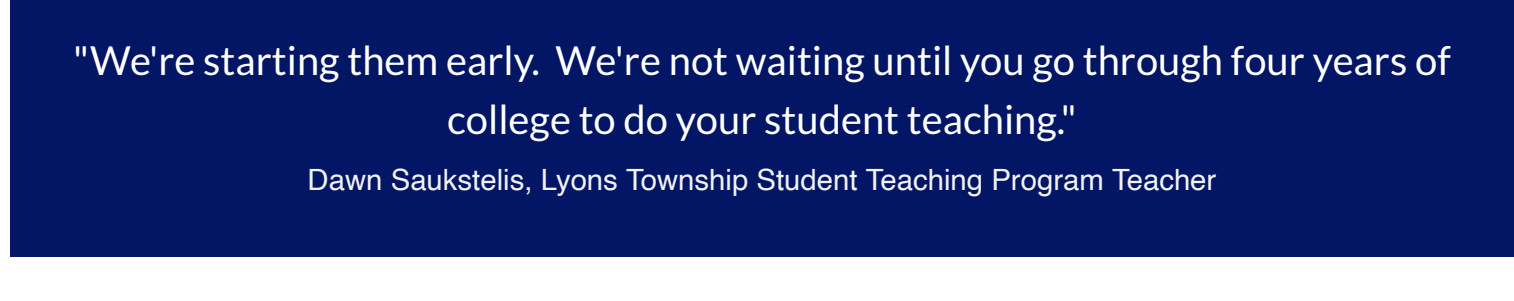
Each visit is an important step toward her goal of becoming an educator as an adult.

"When I was given the opportunity for this, I immediately jumped on it," Letourneau said. "I know the expectations of me being a teacher and what responsibilities I would have going into the classroom, so being here is definitely very important."

It's also an opportunity for Chicago area high schools to create a pipeline of future educators to help solve the teacher shortage.

Dawn Saukstelis, who runs the Lyons Township program, said student teachers can learn classroom management styles while observing and working with teachers at partner elementary and middle schools.

"Some of them get to the point where they're leading whole group lessons," Saukstelis said. "We're starting them early. We're not waiting until you go through four years of college to do your student teaching."



A district spokesperson said the teaching internship at Lyons Township High School has been around for approximately thirty years.

Pleasantdale Middle School math teacher Maggie McCarter participated in the Lyons Township student teaching program while she was a student in high school.

"It just kind of really inspired me to go into math education and just seeing students light up when you work with them is one of those things that made me want to continue," McCarter said.

Student teachers can also earn college credit during the internship program.

"If more parents knew what we are doing and really understood what we're doing with these kids, I think more people would be wanting to check this out and see where they could go with this field. We have so many wonderful offerings," Saukstelis said.

Several other school districts across West Cook County offer similar programs. They include Leyden District 212, Oak Park and River Forest High School, JS Morton High School, and Ridgewood High School.

"We can either complain about the shortage of teachers or we can be part of the solution," said Leyden superintendent Dr. Nick Polyak. "It is critical that we take an active role in encouraging, developing, and supporting the next generation of teachers."



WEST40 PARTNERS WHO ARE INNOVATING

Whether it's achieving gains in the classroom, building on mental health support systems, or giving back to the community, innovation and initiative can be keys to success. These are just some of the West40 partner school districts and non-profit organizations that are setting strong examples.

Making Strides in the Classroom – Cicero District 99

Several years ago, Cicero District 99 started taking strides to move in a new direction. The goal: To improve student outcomes!

To help meet the goal, the District, with the help of West40, said it made a combined effort to provide professional development and structures to help support teachers in their day-to-day practices. Additionally, the District said through the development of its leadership teams, school leadership teams, dedicated walkthroughs with actionable feedback, and additional professional development, the bigger, better, stronger team has led to improved student outcomes.

The result: 12 of the District's schools received "commendable" status on the State's summative designation in the most recent Illinois Report Card, which analyzes student test scores, school improvement plans, accelerated growth and rates of absenteeism. These improvements occurred despite nationwide slowdowns in students' academic growth due to the pandemic.

"West40 supported District 99 along the way through professional development, access to research, identifying the District's strengths and more," said superintendent Dr. Aldo Calderin. "The partnership has been invaluable and we look forward to continued improvements in our students' outcomes!"

Improving Responses to Trauma – Oak Park District 97

As a partner of West40, Oak Park District 97 is always looking for ways to improve their work related to SEL and areas related to trauma and student behavioral health. Recently, Brooks Middle School completed the Trauma Responsive Schools Implementation Assessment with West40 and called it an integral first step in assessing its areas of strengths and areas for growth.

"Having support of a West40 coach allowed us to quickly zero in on action steps and integrate the work into our existing action plans," said Lauren Olsen, Brooks Middle School Culture and Climate Coach. "Our teachers were able to access high quality professional learning through our partnership with West40 that aligned to our action plan."

Olsen added that teachers found the attendance workshops especially helpful for how to think through engaging with families who are struggling with school engagement and attendance.

Using an Equity Lens to Increase SEL Capacity – Komarek District 94

Beginning in 2019, Komarek School District 94 created an Equity Committee for the purpose of continually increasing its capacity to integrate educational equity in existing initiatives, plans, strategies and practices. This year, the district worked with the SEL Hub through West40 to expand its Equity Committee to include a REACH Team. According to the district, results have included completing the Trauma Responsive Schools Implementation Assessment and reviewing data from the assessment for data-driven planning.

District 94 is also working toward creating additional relationships with community health organizations skilled in providing mental health services to students and families.

"One of the many benefits of equity work and trauma informed practices is that the professional learning is ongoing. Keeping this in mind is helpful," said District 94 Curriculum Coordinator Danielle Bagdzius. "There is always something new to learn and the topics are not something that can be checked off. Using an equity lens and becoming trauma informed will only continue to strengthen the climate and culture of any school/district."

Supporting Immigrant Families Thrust into the Spotlight – LaGrange District 105

Immigrant families who found themselves thrust into the national spotlight after being bussed from Texas to Illinois last fall were welcomed by LaGrange District 105, which supported and educated the children in the months following their arrival. The district said the families were very appreciative and highly involved in the success of their children in its schools.

"The children made tremendous progress both academically and with the English proficiency. West40 provided a family liaison to help support students and families during the transition. That support was essential to the overall success of the students and helping the families navigate their transition to our community," said District of ELL Dr. Socorro Mendoza.

The district said the majority of the families have since been placed in more permanent housing outside of the district and no longer attend its schools.

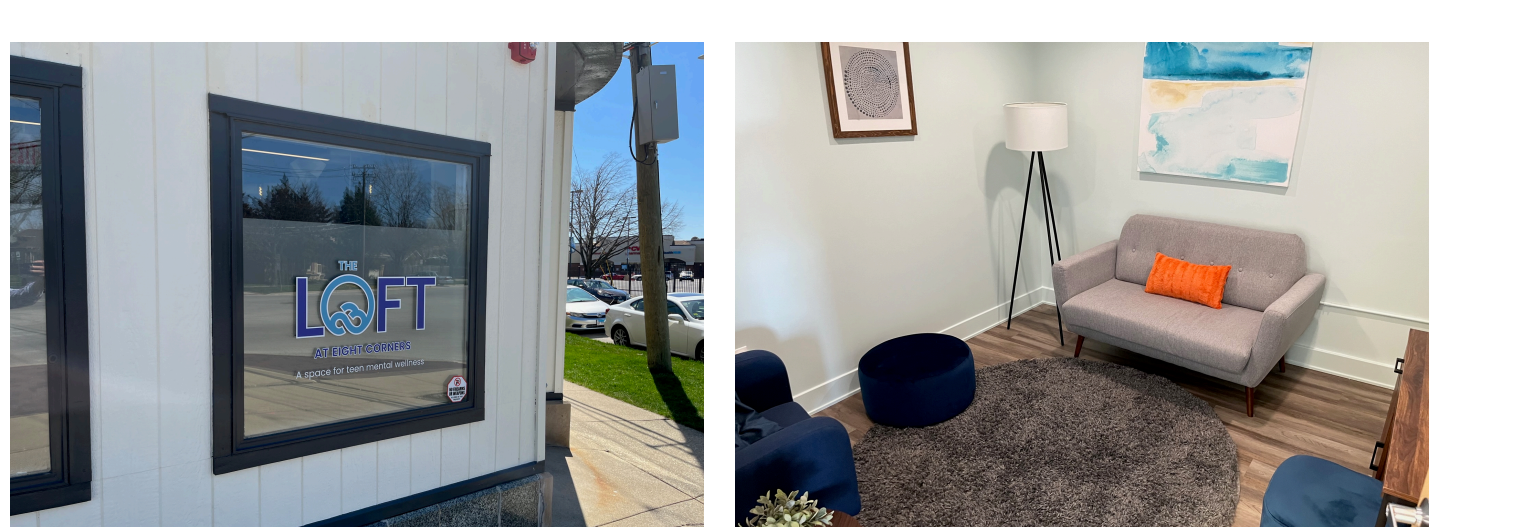
Teen Mental Health Support – The Loft at 8 Corners

The Chicago area's first of its kind teen-focused center that is educating, engaging, and supporting young people's mental health recently opened in Brookfield. The Loft at Eight Corners provides a space for high school-aged teens and their families to access a wide range of services 365 days a year, all free of charge, in both English and Spanish.

"We really felt like this was a great community that prioritizes mental health, where we felt like we could start something new here," said education manager Andrea O'Morrow. "Ideally, we would love to continue growing. We would love to strengthen our partnerships with local schools. We'd love to have strong referral systems in place where anyone who's working one-on-one with teens can know us as a resource."

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) is partnering with Pillars Community Health to provide services at The Loft. Learn more about The Loft: <https://loft8corners.org/>.

NAMI has supported West40 with resources and programming and West40 supports NAMI through referrals.



Coordinating Donation Drives – Riveredge Hospital

West40 partners are taking the initiative when it comes to collecting and distributing essential items to the public. We'd like to spotlight the work of Riveredge Hospital, which held a winter clothing drive and collected books for patients. The hospital also promotes food donation drives and works with local community food pantries.

"We do this in partnership with many agencies to help promote mental health, healing and support the patient and families," said Mike Rudolph of Riveredge Hospital. "By working in partnership with all of our community agencies, the patients can receive support from us all."

West40 has connections with area non profit organizations that can help with the following: mental health, food, health for underinsured, furniture, clothing, and immigration.

HONORING STUDENT CITIZENS OF THE YEAR

Huge ovations and smiling faces greeted more than one hundred recipients of the School Citizen of the Year (SCOTY) award on March 22 as West40 honored students who go above and beyond in the classroom.



Area educators from across the West Cook County region nominated students for their positive attitude, willingness to help others, leadership skills, and work ethic.

"The Student Citizen of the Year (SCOTY) awards are a great opportunity for West40 and our districts to recognize our amazing students," said Milosovic. "SCOTY of Support Services John Milosovic." "SCOTY brings students, families and school staff together to celebrate their son/daughter/student's achievement in the classroom and in their community."

"When I think of kindness, he is the first student I think of," a nominator wrote of a fourth grader who received the honor.

The 2023 SCOTY Awards hosted 131 students and more than 900 attendees. The event was held in the West Leyden High School Auditorium.

Another nominator wrote how a selected student "goes out of her way to be helpful to her peers whether helping with classwork, translating, or showing kindness."

Ingrid Alonso, sophomore at the West40 Regional Safe School and Jacob Corona, fifth grader at the West40 Remote School, were among the proud SCOTY Award recipients to walk across the stage and receive a medal and certificate.



School Threat Assessments

Act now for FY24. West40 can help you with School Safety and Threat Assessment needs. [Contact us](#) to learn more.

Mental Health Roundtable at Cicero District 99

On Friday, May 19, Cicero District 99 will partner with Chicagoland-based Sustainable Mental Wellness, Inc. to host the District's seventh Mental Health Roundtable, focusing on the overall well-being of students and staff and what it means to truly support "the whole person." The event takes place from noon to 3 p.m. at Abraham Lincoln Elementary School (3545 S. 61st Ave., Cicero). The in-person program is open to educators and health professionals throughout the region, from school districts and community health centers to local and state municipal leaders.

