

Don't Forget About Yourself

A Message from Mark - June 2024

Dear West40 Stakeholders,

Congratulations on completing a successful 2023-24 school year! Your dedication, hard work, and commitment have made a significant impact on our students and community. As we transition into the summer, I encourage each of you to take some time to reflect on the lessons learned this year and think about how we can continue to grow and achieve our future goals. It is essential to build on our successes and address any challenges with renewed energy and determination. Most importantly, I hope you all take the opportunity to enjoy your well-deserved time off this summer. Rest, recharge, and spend quality time with your loved ones. Thank you for your unwavering support and efforts. Looking forward to another fantastic year ahead!



Warm regards,

Mark

Focus on Your Mental Health this Summer (and Always)

Amanda Norris has made it a mission to go beyond the therapy chair and focus on mental wellness through a prevention, education, and culturally inclusive lens. Amanda operates Sustainable Mental Wellness, Inc., a human enterprise dedicated to bridging the gap between sustainable living and mental wellness through curated professional development workshops for



educators and corporate leaders. West40 asked Amanda to share tips on how teachers, support staff, and administrators can best enter the summer months with a focus on their own mental wellness.

Q: Briefly share your expertise in the mental wellness field and how you have supported educators in recent years.

A: As a behavioral health therapy provider and community liaison for over 15 years, I have always enjoyed care coordination and collaborating directly with educators and school personnel. Focusing on school-based mental health is a win-win as both fields are dedicated to personal and professional growth with collective student, staff, and community wellness being at the root of a successful academic journey.

Q: Why is it important for educators to focus on their own mental health in addition to supporting their students and colleagues?

A: Educators are innately helpers and healers and are essential to the success of future generations. Sometimes the needs of others are so great and so many, that educators exert all of their energy on their students and schools. Just like a car needs quality fuel and regular maintenance to function well, an educator needs self-awareness, support from their team, and school-community engagement to have the energy and brain power to teach youth day to day.

Q: Is the summer a good time for those in the education field to try anything new or different regarding their mental health?

A: Absolutely - no time like the present to pay attention to mental health! For those educators who are on summer break, finding ways to cultivate personal restoration is essential for ongoing professional success. Whether enjoying time in nature, reconnecting with friends and family, or cleaning out physical and mental clutter, summer is a great time to reset. The most important tip around personal motivation is to renew a realistic intention that a person is ready, willing and able to strive towards.

Q: If a teacher, administrator or support staff member feels overwhelmed, overworked, or underappreciated, what can they do to speak up for themselves in a respectful manner while also getting their point across?

A: In my professional development workshop, "Boundaries, Burnout and Everything In Between," I encourage educators to pause and identify their "non-negotiable" limits in both personal and professional spaces. Gaining perspective on what situations are in and out of one's control is paramount to battling overwhelm and unhelpful feelings. Using non-violent communication skills where the focus is on personal feelings as a result of situations, and not blaming others, is a helpful key to start difficult conversations.

Q: What tips would you share for educators to come back feeling recharged and refreshed for the new school year?

A: Trying something novel or giving back to a cause outside one's circle can be great ways to get a fresh perspective on life. I personally found practicing complementary therapies like Reiki and Qi Gong to be both relaxing and rejuvenating, which is why I became a Reiki Practitioner. Many people already know the hobbies and activities they enjoy, yet over the years some have let the fun fall to the wayside. This summer, educators can take back their time with new-found boundaries and focus on getting back into their own style of positive energy flow.

Learn more about Amanda and contact her at <https://www.sustainablementalwellness.com/>

Building a Case to Bring ALOP to K-3 Students across Illinois

There are growing calls in Illinois to expand ALOP (Alternative Learning Opportunities Programs) to K-3 students. Currently, ALOP is only available to 4-12 students. The video below describes the benefits of ALOP and what it would take to make the programs available to more students and families across Illinois. Be sure to also check out [West40: A Closer Look](#) for more details.

https://youtu.be/rxJ_jJKW6Yg?feature=shared



Lawmakers Approve School Construction Grant Bill and Changes to Educator Content Exam

A West40-backed bill that would authorize the Illinois State Board of Education to make school construction grants available to regional offices of education and intermediate service centers, like West40, has made it out of the General Assembly and is awaiting the Governor's signature.

Additionally, lawmakers approved a bill that, if signed into law by the Governor, would update the existing certification process for those seeking to become elementary school teachers. The elementary education (Grades 1-6) content exam is one of several tests that has been a source of concern for prospective educators, due in part to low first-time passing rates. HB5057, however, provides that the State Board of Education would make available a content test for grades 1-6

teaching applicants that removes questions regarding college algebra, college statistics, and music theory. The bill also allows for the retaking of only the subsections of the test that were failed previously and it allows for student teachers to be in classrooms without first having passed the applicable content test. West40's exclusive reporting and research on this topic can be found [here](#).

Illinois Holocaust Museum Offering Virtual Reality Teaching Trunks to Schools

Imagine visiting a former concentration camp with a Holocaust survivor without ever leaving the classroom. West40 has partnered with the Illinois Holocaust Museum to produce a video that features the Museum's mobile virtual reality teaching trunks, which allow students to "walk" with Holocaust survivors they tour former concentration camps and their hometowns and share their stories. See how the technology works in the video below. Reserve a trunk for your school [here](#).

Holocaust Survivors Guide Students Through Their Stories in Virtual Reality Learning Experience

THROUGH THEIR STORIES IN VIRTUAL REALITY LEARNING EXPERIENCE



West40 Paraprofessional Trainings Series

West40 is excited to announce a new training series for paraprofessionals, who perform an essential role by supporting students and assisting teachers in classroom management.



As a result of West40's existing "Paraprofessional 101" workshops, our partner districts saw the need to continue other training opportunities for paraprofessionals. The result is a new four part series that will include:

- Paraprofessional 101
- Disability Awareness and the IEP
- Introduction to Escalation Behaviors
- The Relationship in the Classroom

"Paraprofessionals spend more time with the students than any other educational professional in the system and oftentimes get the least training. The students deserve well trained support staff," said Demian LaPointe, West40 professional learning specialist.

Each workshop in the Paraprofessional Trainings Series ranges from 1-3 hours, depending on the time needs of the district.

West40's paraprofessional training started as a need that our partner districts had regarding the shortage of paraprofessionals and the subsequent changes in the law to meet the demand. The law requires that paraprofessionals now have a high school diploma and pass a skills test. Previously, paraprofessionals were required to have some college credits. This left a need for baseline paraprofessional training.

School districts and paraprofessionals can learn more about scheduling a workshop by contacting LaPointe at Dlapointe@west40.org.

All Aboard for West40's Administrator Academies

West40 is offering administrator academies to support your development to better serve area students. Click on the links for more information about the following opportunities:

AA4050 for Principal Evaluation Initial Training

A new 2-day in-person AA that replaces AA2000 and AA1865 (beginning July 1st). It is required for any individual training who will evaluate principals and assistant principals. Group discounts available.

July 16th and July 17th

[LEARN MORE AND REGISTER HERE](#)

AA3967 School Leader Evaluation: A Growth-Focused Approach

For principals and assistant principals to learn about the School Leader Paradigm. Group discounts available.

July 29, 2024, 8:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

[LEARN MORE AND REGISTER HERE](#)

Licensure Renewal Reminder

Does your educator, paraprofessional or substitute license expire in 2024? Please don't forget to renew your license by June 30th.

Here's how:

1. Log into your ELIS (Educator Licensure Information System) account
2. Make sure you have entered the required amount of Professional Development (if required)

3. Click "Renewal" on your ELIS home page under the "Action Center"
4. Follow the renewal instructions
5. Pay the registration fee with a debit or credit card

If you need additional assistance, please reach out to licensure@west40.org and either Sharon Balderas or Gina Sierra will be happy to help you.



West40 Communications Department

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