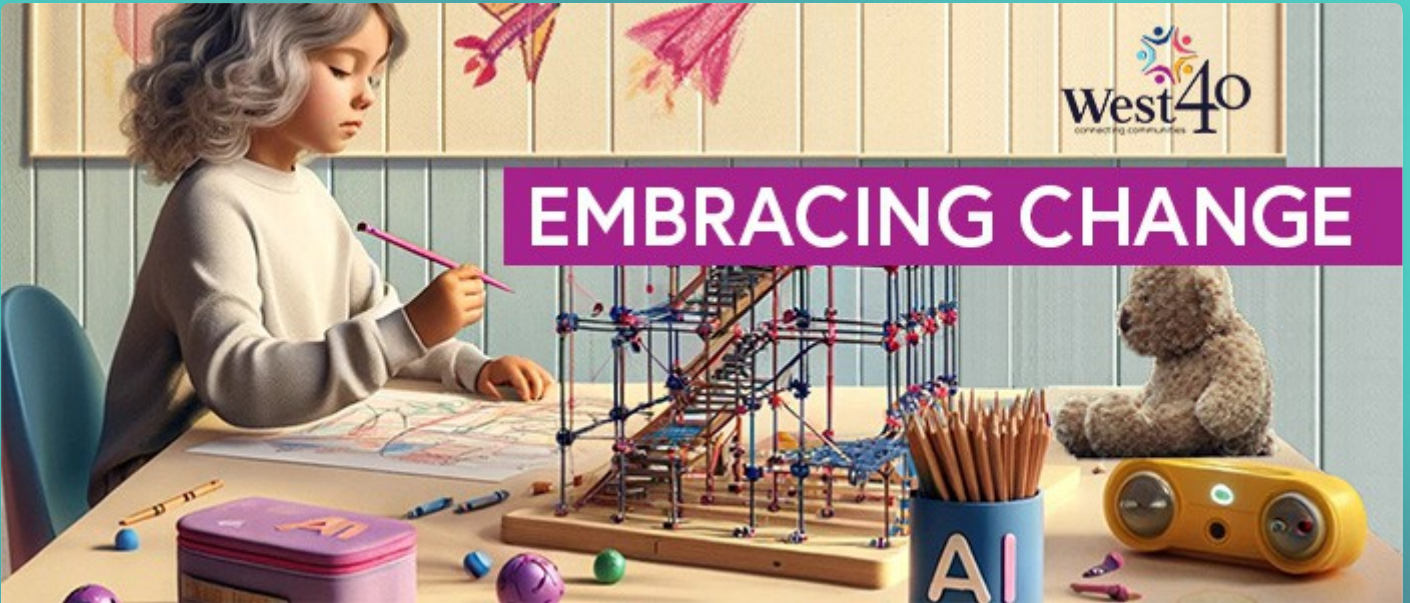


EMBRACING CHANGE



A Message from Mark - April 2024

Greetings and welcome to our April Newsletter! We will take a look at the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI). At West40, we love to say, "we don't think outside the box, we live outside of the box!" We say this with a smile, but we are clear that we are an organization that is defined by our action moving forward! To model embracing change, I have constructed a part of my message this month with the use of ChatGPT. It took a couple of attempts in ChatGPT while applying Bloom's taxonomy in reviewing it. Here is what we came up with:



As we stand on the brink of this new era, the educational community must embrace both the joy and the fear that accompany change. The path forward is paved with challenges, including ethical dilemmas and the looming shadow of the digital divide. Yet, it's also illuminated by the bright light of opportunity—opportunity to make education more accessible, personalized, and truly reflective of the needs of the 21st-century learner. In navigating these changes, our emotions are our compass, guiding us through the storms of uncertainty towards a future where education is transformed for the better by AI. This journey is not just about adapting to change; it's about embracing it with an open heart and a hopeful spirit, ready to explore the vast potential that lies ahead.

What did you think?

West40 now has an internal AI Task Force to look at the possible roles of AI and our Innovation Team continues to inspire and empower educators to explore what's possible in education. We are being forward thinking, careful and having fun as we move and live outside of the box. Have a wonderful Spring!

Thoughtfully,



Getting Ready for AI's Impact on Students and Teachers

It's only a matter of time before artificial intelligence becomes a regular part of the learning experience. Yes, it may be scary to think about students using AI in the classroom. But people were also concerned about the impact calculators and the Internet would have on education.

Generative Artificial Intelligence is already turning heads by creating videos, texts, and audio out of nothing except for a prompt. In fact, the artwork featured behind the "Embracing Change" title at the very top of this newsletter was created by a prompt typed into an online AI tool.

Micah Miner, District Administrator for Instructional Technology and Social Studies at Maywood, Melrose Park, Broadview School District 99, has extensively studied AI's potential impact on education.

"I do think it will radically redefine what teaching and learning looks like, along with what working could look like in our world," Miner said.

According to Miner, it will be important for schools to establish AI policies by August 2024 so students can learn the new AI future that they are walking into without compromising academic integrity.

"It is our job to prepare their futures and teach them young how to be critical and not just consumers of AI," Miner said. "We need to provide time for us to slowly adapt it and adopt it and to make sure that we're using AI to help kids instructively rather than have it just do their homework for them."

Miner will be presenting two sessions on AI and Education at the West40 office in Maywood on April 15 and May 3. Education leaders and teachers are encouraged to attend. [Click here to register for the April 15 event](#) and [click here to register for the May 3 event](#).

You can also hear more from Miner about AI and Education on the [Shift Everything podcast](#).

Dorothy's Journey - Winter 2024

Dorothy is a current West40 ALOP student who is nearing graduation at East Leyden High School. We featured Dorothy in a video in late 2022. In this follow up interview, Dorothy talks about her senior year and her exciting plans for the future.



West40 Advocacy Day in Springfield Recap

The mission of West40's caravan to Springfield on March 13 was clear: thank state legislators for their ongoing support of all schools through Evidence Based Funding (EBF) and advocate for regional safe school funding improvements.

Participating West40 team members collectively made a lot of great connections with lawmakers and/or their assistants and spread the word about our bills and funding requests. We

advocated for HB4800, which refines the Regional Safe School Grant distribution formula so each regional office/intermediate service center gets \$100,000 instead of \$30,000 in any year in which the allocation for the grant is at or above \$23,730,000. The formula would use average student enrollment instead of average daily attendance to create a more stable calculation.

We also asked lawmakers to support HB5418, which would allow ROEs and ISCs to be able to apply for School Construction and Maintenance Grants just like school districts, special education cooperatives, technology centers and cooperate high schools.



West40 News and Notes

Annual SCOTY Awards Honors Students

We were honored to present SCOTY Awards to 132 students from the West40 area on March 20. SCOTY stands for School Citizen of the Year and students were chosen by their schools as having demonstrated outstanding qualities of leadership, kindness, and service. Students received a certificate, a medal, and a SCOTY water bottle. Thanks to West Leyden HS for hosting the event

and a special shout out to Leyden Band Director Brian Miller, who is retiring after 30 years of service and leadership!

ICEARY Conference in Bloomington/Normal

Dozens of West40 team members traveled to Bloomington/Normal in early March to attend the annual Illinois Coalition for Educating At Risk Youth (ICEARY) Conference. There we attended learning sessions and met educators and student advocates from across the state. We walked away with new and inspiring ways to support youth!

A special congratulations goes out to two West40 students who were honored at the conference.

Recent West40 graduate Maria Basulto was the recipient of the 2024 ICEARY Outstanding Student Award! Maria was nominated by the West40 Regional Safe School staff, who said Maria "stands as a beacon of inspiration within her community, family, and the Safe School family, a true hero of her own life story."

Alexis Garcias-Salas from Proviso DREAM was also a finalist for the award. Alexis said he plans to become a diesel mechanic so he can provide for himself and help his family.

Congratulations again to Maria and Alexis!

West40 Educator Job Fair a Success

West40 held its first educator job fair at our main office in Maywood on February 24, 2024. Nearly 30 west suburban Cook County school districts participated in the job fair hoping to meet prospective teachers, paraprofessionals, substitute teachers, school staff, and administrators.

Thank you to everyone who helped make the inaugural West40 Educator Job Fair a success! The occasion brought together our partner school districts and job seekers and created opportunities for employment and collaboration across our districts. We received a lot of positive feedback from our participating school districts the day of our job fair and we are hoping to make this an annual event.

Spelling Bee

Congratulations to all of the talented spellers who participated in the 14th Annual West40 Scripps Spelling Bee on March 5 at Lindop School in Broadview! West40 comprehensive educational services specialist Jeff Smith served as a judge. 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place finalists from the North Cook, South Cook, and West40 spelling bees qualified to compete at the regional spelling bee on March 26 for an opportunity to advance to the National Spelling Bee the week of Memorial Day in Maryland.

Speech Competition

The 37th West40 Speech & Drama Festival was held February 24 at Elmwood Park High School and served as an opportunity for students in grades 5-8 to perform before a live audience. According to West40 speech and drama coordinator Dr. Patricia Ann Braun, the solo, duet and group events

"It is amazing how talented, confident and entertaining these young people are," said Braun.

Trophies were awarded to the four complete teams that performed.

1st D97 Oak Park

2nd D96 Riverside: Hauser Jr High

3rd D105 LaGrange: Gurrie Middle School/Spring Ave Elementary

4th D93 Hillside School

If you are interested in having students compete in next year's festival, contact Dr. Braun via email at pbraun09@yahoo.com.

TVTP Grants Available!

West40 has executed the Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention (TVTP) Grant, which provides our partner school districts up to 10 hours of (FREE) training covered by this grant through FY25 (September 30, 2025). Districts are strongly encouraged to take advantage of this opportunity to keep our school communities, staff, and students safe! Funding is limited. Contact Phil Abraham of West40 at pabraham@west40.org if you are interested setting up a time to discuss the grant and check out our [podcast discussing the TVTP grant opportunity](#).



West40 Communications Department

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