



The Timeless Advantage: Preserving the Humanities in the Age of AI

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

There is a profound irony in this moment.

The more advanced our technology becomes, the more essential a classic liberal arts education becomes.

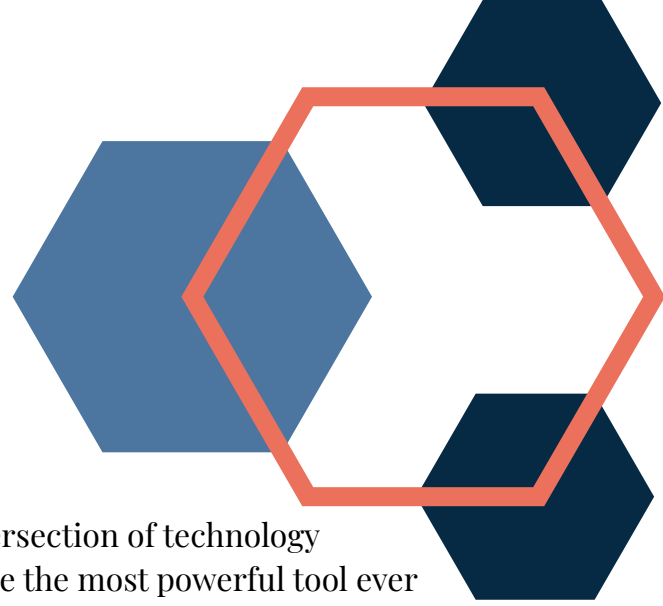
In an age of artificial intelligence, when machines can compute, compose, and even create, what will distinguish our students is not how much information they can recall, but how deeply they can think, feel, and discern. As AI accelerates knowledge, it is the humanities that preserve understanding. As automation expands capability, it is history, literature, and philosophy that preserve judgment.

The liberal arts have had many definitions over the centuries, but in Westport schools, they are understood as the disciplines and practices that expand our intellectual capacities, general knowledge, and personal abilities to engage as free and contributing citizens. And a crucial pillar of our forward-thinking liberal arts education is the humanities: English, social studies, and the fine arts.

In a society increasingly fragmented by technology, the humanities offer students opportunities to analyze, contextualize, and grapple with what it means to be human and how to make wise, ethical decisions in a complicated world. In studying the humanities, students interact with the texts, sources, traditions, events, and philosophies that have helped shape our culture, and embrace the value of those things in other cultures, both past and present.

Westport schools have a proud tradition of excellence in the humanities; our learners dive deeply into literature both classic and new, study societies through varied analytical lenses, and take advantage of the finest music, performing, and visual art programs available. This initiative aims to protect and enhance that tradition in order to prepare students for a world changing at a rapid pace.

Our commitment to the humanities will help students become more empathetic, creative, curious, and self-reliant. It will empower them to tolerate ambiguity, think critically across disciplines, discern meaning from the flood of information and resist the enticing technological shortcuts that define modern life. It will celebrate their uniqueness and elevate their voices.



Steve Jobs once said that Apple’s secret was found “at the intersection of technology and the liberal arts.” The same is true for education. AI may be the most powerful tool ever created, but it will only be as wise, ethical, and creative as the people who guide it. The liberal arts are where those people are formed.

This is not about nostalgia. It is about foresight.

It is about protecting what is timeless while preparing for what is next. It is about ensuring that our students, in a world overflowing with data, still know how to find meaning.

A renewed commitment to a classic liberal arts education will empower students to question, to connect, and to create, not in imitation of machines, but in the full expression of what it means to be human.

This is our moral imperative: to ensure that in a world of brilliant machines, our students remain brilliantly human.



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WHAT ARE WE GOING TO ACCOMPLISH?

The humanities are a defining strength of a Westport education, an anchor of discernment, creativity, and ethical reasoning in an AI-powered world. Our goal will not be to reinvent what already works, but rather to protect our excellence while seeking opportunities for perpetual improvement and adaptation to a changing environment. We will elevate the humanities as a defining strength of a Westport education.

To strengthen this foundation, we will take an inventory of our best practices and traditions as a leader in public school education, while also learning from exemplary peers and the higher education institutions where our graduates thrive. Through this reflection, research, and comparison, we will see more clearly what already distinguishes us and what our next level of excellence might look like.

Celebrating the intellectual and creative accomplishments of our students—writing, researching, thinking, composing, creating, and performing—will remain at the heart of our mission. At the same time, faculty will be empowered as national leaders in their fields, supported by structures and resources that sustain and expand their impact.

At the core of this work is a reaffirmation of the classic liberal arts as the moral and intellectual center of an AI Powered, Human Centered education, where knowledge is joined with empathy, creativity with conscience, and innovation with integrity.

We will reaffirm the role of the humanities as the moral and intellectual core of a human-centered education as we embrace the opportunities provided by advanced technological tools like machine learning and artificial intelligence. Our success will not be measured in test scores, but rather in our students' capacity to think critically, compose persuasively, and act courageously. It will be defined by how our graduates lead in their institutions, professions, and communities.

By the end of this work, Westport will be recognized not only for preparing students to compete in a technological world, but for preparing them to elevate it, shaping leaders who understand that progress without wisdom is not advancement at all.

INITIATIVES

- Inventory and Research Best Practices
- Define Our “Next Level”
- Partnering With Technology
- Support Faculty as Instructional Leaders
- Inspire Community Engagement and Celebration
- Advance Interdisciplinary Opportunities
- Designing Time for Humanity: Rethinking Master Schedules

HOW WILL WE ACCOMPLISH THIS?

We will pursue a purposeful series of initiatives that honor our existing excellence in the humanities while positioning Westport to lead nationally in defining the human side of education in an AI-powered world. This work will begin with learning from the best and evolving through reflection and innovation, and it will culminate in defining our own next level of excellence.

1. **Inventory and Research Best Practices:** Conduct a rigorous self-study of Westport Public Schools' best practices in the humanities and a comprehensive study of leading humanities programs in peer learning institutions. Identify characteristics of pedagogy and curriculum design that cultivate voice, habits of critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and creativity.

2. **Defining the Next Level:** Use insights from reflection and research to articulate what distinguishes Westport's humanities program today and what should define its next steps. Preserve and improve existing practices and opportunities for students to develop empathy, creativity, critical thinking, and curiosity.

3. **Partnering with Technology:** Identify clear criteria to determine when advanced technology enhances rather than inhibits students' thinking. Design assignments that rely on uniquely human skills and reinforce the value of students' own voices and reasoning. Gather and design instructional models that engage students in questioning, creation, and reflection in novel ways.

4. **Support Faculty as Instructional Leaders** – Recognize and honor exemplary practices in WPS. Provide time and support for faculty to research, collaborate, align and innovate. Establish partnerships with educational and cultural organizations that strengthen both content expertise and thought leadership in the humanities.

5. **Inspire Community Engagement and Celebration** – Emphasize the vital role of the humanities in shaping thoughtful citizens by increasing the scope and frequency of exhibitions, performances, publications, and symposia that celebrate student work. Highlight the relationship between these high level achievements and the learning that made them possible.

6. **Advancing interdisciplinary opportunities** – Plan for future interdisciplinary initiatives that connect humanities to STEM subjects.

7. **Designing Time for Humanity: Rethinking Master Schedules** – Audit how time is used across subjects, engage stakeholders to assess impacts on learning and wellbeing, benchmark exemplary models, particularly those with a thriving humanities program, and present recommendations to pilot schedules that advance this work.



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Action Steps

1. Inventory and Research Best Practices

- Conduct a comprehensive self-study of WPS best practices in humanities.
- Research leading humanities programs in schools that share WPS's values and standards of excellence. Visit or engage with peer and post-secondary institutions to observe models of student-centered inquiry and faculty collaboration.
- Identify indicators of excellence in pedagogy and curriculum design that cultivate voice, habits of critical thinking, ethical reasoning and creativity.
- Synthesize findings into a report and presentation: "Humanities Benchmark Study: Lessons from the Field."

2. Defining the Next Level

- Convene humanities department leaders and teachers to review inventory and research results in order to identify priorities for growth.
- Develop a shared set of guiding practices for a world-class humanities education in Westport, one that merges classic education with the skills and knowledge that will empower students.
- Establish short- and long-term focus areas (e.g., increasing opportunities for inquiry, encouraging creativity and curiosity, supporting interdisciplinary work, elevating student authorship and expression, etc.)
- Draft a district statement articulating the enduring value of humanities to connect us in an increasingly fragmented and digital world.

3. Partnering with Technology

- Identify clear criteria to determine when advanced technology enhances rather than inhibits students' thinking.
- Gather exemplar lessons where AI enhances, not replaces, human creativity and critical analysis.
- Pilot classroom activities that use AI to augment instruction and identify learning opportunities that would not be possible without AI.
- Create district guidelines that foster integrity and safeguard skill development within the humanities courses, aligned with the AI Code of Ethics.

4. Support Faculty as Instructional Leaders

- Recognize and celebrate faculty leadership in the humanities throughout the district and community.
- Assemble a Humanities Faculty Cohort to implement and reflect on innovative practices in instruction, assessment, and curriculum design.
- Provide opportunities for teachers to lead presentations, write articles, and share practices within and beyond the district.
- Support ongoing partnerships with local universities, museums, and humanities councils to offer short and long-term advanced professional learning and collaborative projects.



5. Inspire Community Engagement and Celebration

- Identify and expand upon current opportunities that feature student writing, performances, presentations, debates, and civic dialogue.
- Collaborate with community partners, alumni, and local cultural institutions. Offer opportunities for community events in our schools and to feature student work in public spaces.

6. Advancing Interdisciplinary Opportunities

- Plan for long-term interdisciplinary opportunities (projects, courses, etc.) that connect the humanities and other subjects.
- Identify opportunities where the humanities can help solve technological, ethical or design challenges.
- Create opportunities for students to initiate collaborative projects with each other and teachers, unrestricted by the school schedule.

7. Designing Time for Humanity: Rethinking Master Schedules

- Conduct a comprehensive time audit to analyze how instructional and transition time are distributed across all subjects.
- Facilitate student, teacher, and parent focus groups to understand how schedule structure affects learning, engagement, and balance.
- Benchmark model schedules from top-performing middle schools known for nurturing intellectual curiosity and emotional well-being.
- Evaluate how time allocation impacts writing, reading, collaboration, and creative inquiry, the essential ingredients of liberal arts learning.
- Present recommendations to the Board, identifying opportunities to build new scheduling models aligned with district priorities.



The Timeless Advantage: Preserving the Humanities in the Age of AI

Initiative Name	Inventory and Research Best Practices	Initiative Status:	Pending
Supports Objective	The Timeless Advantage: Preserving the Humanities in the Age of AI		
Initiative Owner	Anna Mahon, Jess DiBuono, Lauren Francese, Humanities Sub-Committee		
Initiative Summary	Conduct an internal examination of WPS humanities programs along with a review of leading external programs to identify the teaching and curricular approaches that most effectively build students' voice, critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and creativity		
Resources Needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty/staff time (during and outside contractual hours) • Funding for release time • Summer work funding • Hanover Research 		

#	Milestones	Start Date	End Date	Status
1	Establish humanities sub-committee and complete internal humanities self-study.	Fall 2025	Spring 2026	Pending
2	Compile list of external programs and establish criteria for exploration, organize research plan, set up site visits. Partner with Hanover Research to conduct a review of exemplary programs.	Winter 2025/26	Early Spring 2026	Pending
3	Conduct site visits and complete external research.	Spring 2026	June 2026	Pending
4	Synthesize and process gathered information in preparation for compendium publication that identifies indicators of excellence	Summer 2026	Fall 2026	Pending
5	Publish "Humanities Benchmark Study: Lessons from the Field."	Fall 2026	Winter 2026	Pending

Metrics for Success	
Study completed and shared with staff and Board.	
Participation from at least five benchmark institutions.	
Faculty and leadership alignment on lessons learned and implications for practice.	

Board/Community Message

"We are learning from the best to ensure our students receive the finest liberal arts education in the nation — one that combines timeless thinking with modern relevance."

Initiative Name	Define The “Next Level”	Initiative Status:	Pending
Supports Objective	The Timeless Advantage: Preserving the Humanities in the Age of AI		
Initiative Owner	Anna Mahon, Jess DiBuono, Lauren Francese, Humanities Department Representatives		
Initiative Summary	Use findings from “Inventory and Research Best Practices” to clarify what currently defines our humanities program, what is working, and where there are areas for growth in the future, strengthening opportunities for students to develop empathy, creativity, critical thinking, and curiosity.		
Resources Required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty/staff time (during and outside contractual hours) • Funding for release time • Summer work funding 		

#	Milestones	Start Date	End Date	Status
1	Bring together humanities leaders and teachers to review what we learned from the program inventory and outside research.	Fall 2026	Winter 2026/27	Pending
2	Identify key priorities for growth based on the strengths and needs revealed through that review.	Winter 2026/27	Spring 2027	Pending
3	Create a shared set of guiding practices that define a world-class humanities education in Westport, blending timeless learning with the skills students need today.	Winter 2026/27	Spring 2027	Pending
4	Set short- and long-term focus areas such as expanding inquiry, encouraging creativity and curiosity, strengthening interdisciplinary work, and elevating student voice and expression.	Spring 2027	Summer 2027	Pending
5	Write a district statement that clearly conveys the lasting value of the humanities and their role in connecting people in an increasingly digital world.	Spring 2027	Summer 2027	Pending

Metrics for Success	
Shared “Next Level” framework approved by faculty and leadership.	
Liberal arts priorities reflected in the Contributing Citizens framework.	
Board endorsement of district humanities statement.	

Board/Community Message

“Westport’s next level of excellence in the humanities will prepare students not just for college or career — but to lead and elevate humanity in a world of technology.”



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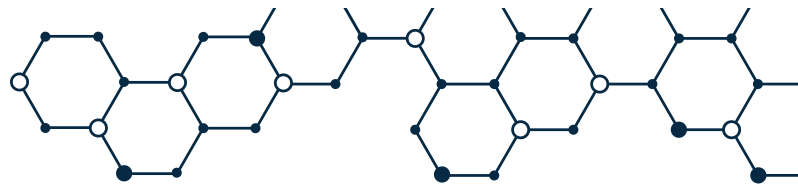
Initiative Name	Partnering With Technology	Initiative Status:	Pending
Supports Objective	The Timeless Advantage: Preserving the Humanities in the Age of AI		
Initiative Owner	Anna Mahon, Jess DiBuono, Lauren Francese, Humanities Department Representatives, PDEC		
Initiative Summary	Develop classroom models that use AI to deepen inquiry, creativity, and ethical reflection in the humanities — ensuring technology enhances, rather than diminishes, the uniquely human elements of learning.		
Resources Needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty/staff time (during and outside contractual hours) • Funding for release time • Summer work funding 		

#	Milestones	Start Date	End Date	Status
1	Define criteria and gather examples showing when AI meaningfully supports student thinking, creativity, and analysis without replacing their own work.	Fall 2026	Spring 2027	Pending
2	Provide professional learning on authorship, originality, and ethics in an AI context.	Spring 2027	Ongoing	Pending
3	Pilot classroom activities that use AI to expand learning opportunities in ways not otherwise possible, documenting what works for students and teachers.	Spring 2026	Spring 2027	Pending
4	Create district guidelines that promote integrity and preserve essential humanities skills, aligned with the AI Code of Ethics.	Summer 2027	Fall 2027	Pending

Metrics for Success	
At least 10 model lessons developed and implemented across grade levels.	
100% of humanities faculty trained in AI ethics and authorship.	
Positive teacher and student feedback on AI-enhanced learning experiences.	

Board/Community Message

“AI belongs in our classrooms — not as a replacement for human thought, but as a tool to deepen it.”



Initiative Name	Support Faculty as Instructional Leaders	Initiative Status:	Pending
Supports Objective	The Timeless Advantage: Preserving the Humanities in the Age of AI		
Initiative Owner	Tom Scarice, Anna Mahon, Jess DiBuono, Lauren Francese, PDEC		
Initiative Summary	Support and celebrate humanities educators as intellectual leaders in the district and beyond. Build partnerships and professional learning pathways that elevate their expertise, creativity, and voice in shaping the liberal arts of the future.		
Resources Required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty/staff time (during and outside contractual hours) • Funding for release time • Summer work funding 		

#	Milestones	Start Date	End Date	Status
1	Launch a Humanities Faculty Cohort that pilots innovative instructional, assessment, and curriculum practices and regularly reflects on their impact.	Fall 2026	Spring 2027	Pending
2	Recognize and elevate faculty leadership by showcasing outstanding humanities teaching and contributions across the district and in the wider community.	Winter 2026	Ongoing	Pending
3	Create platforms for teacher voice by supporting faculty in presenting, publishing, and sharing effective practices within Westport and with regional or national audiences.	Fall 2026	Ongoing	Pending
4	Strengthen partnerships with universities, museums, and humanities organizations to provide ongoing advanced professional learning and collaborative projects for teachers.	Spring 2026	Ongoing	Pending

Metrics for Success	
100% of humanities faculty engaged in the cohort within two years.	
Three or more active partnerships with higher education or cultural institutions.	
Faculty recognized as presenters or authors in professional forums.	

Board/Community Message

“Our educators are not just teaching the humanities — they are defining what it means to teach humanity itself.”



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Initiative Name	Inspire Community Engagement and Celebration	Initiative Status:	Pending
Supports Objective	The Timeless Advantage: Preserving the Humanities in the Age of AI		
Initiative Owner	Jess DiBuono, Lauren Francese, Humanities department members		
Initiative Summary	Highlight and celebrate the role of the humanities in shaping citizenship, empathy, and creative expression. Showcase student and faculty achievements through exhibitions, performances, and civic dialogue.		
Resources Needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faculty/staff time (during and outside contractual hours) 		

#	Milestones	Start Date	End Date	Status
1	Expand opportunities to showcase student work—including writing, performances, presentations, debates, and civic dialogue—through existing school events and new public-facing platforms.	Spring 2027	Ongoing	Future
2	Collaborate with community partners, alumni, and cultural institutions to host events in our schools and feature student work in community spaces, strengthening connections across Westport.	Fall 2027	Ongoing	Future

Metrics for Success	
Annual showcase with participation from all secondary schools.	
Increased community engagement and attendance at humanities events.	
Student reflection data indicates growth in empathy and ethical awareness.	

Board/Community Message

“The humanities remind us that education’s purpose is not only to inform minds, but to transform hearts.”

Initiative Name	Advance Interdisciplinary Opportunities	Initiative Status:	Pending
Supports Objective	The Timeless Advantage: Preserving the Humanities in the Age of AI		
Initiative Owner	Anna Mahon, Curriculum Coordinator, Teacher Leaders		
Initiative Summary	Begin long-term planning for interdisciplinary initiatives connecting the humanities with STEM, and the arts. Establish structures that encourage creativity and ethical reflection across disciplines.		
Resources Required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty/staff time (during and outside contractual hours) • Summer work funding 		

#	Milestones	Start Date	End Date	Status
1	Design long-term interdisciplinary opportunities—such as projects and courses—that connect the humanities with other subject areas.	2027	2028	Future
2	Identify real-world challenges where the humanities can help students explore technological, ethical, or design questions from multiple perspectives	2028	2029	Future
3	Create flexible structures for student collaboration that allow learners and teachers to launch cross-disciplinary projects beyond the limits of the traditional school schedule.	2028	2029	Future

Metrics for Success	
Pilot projects launched in at least two schools.	
Increased teacher participation in interdisciplinary teams.	

Board/Community Message

“The most powerful innovations occur where disciplines meet — where logic meets art, and technology meets humanity.



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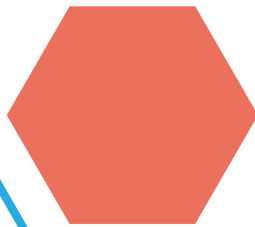
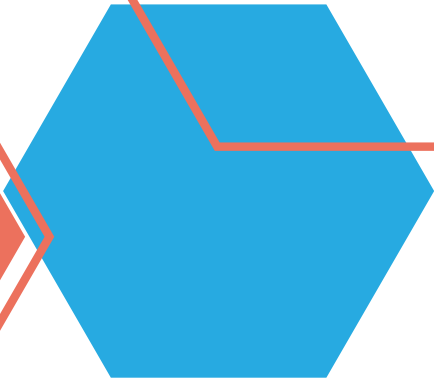
Initiative Name	Designing Time for Humanity: Rethinking Master Schedules	Initiative Status:	Pending
Supports Objective	The Timeless Advantage: Elevating the Liberal Arts in the Age of AI		
Initiative Owner			
Initiative Summary	Reexamine how time is structured in district master schedules at the secondary level to ensure that every minute reflects our values: depth over speed, reflection over routine, humanity over hurry. This study will explore how schedule design can better support authentic learning, creativity, and wellbeing, especially within the humanities, world languages, and arts, disciplines central to developing Contributing Citizens who think deeply and act with empathy.		
Resources Needed			

#	Milestones	Start Date	End Date	Status
1	Conduct a comprehensive time audit across all schools to analyze how instructional and transition time are distributed.	January 2026	June 2026	Pending
2	Benchmark innovative and balanced master schedule models.	March 2026	June 2026	Pending
3	Evaluate how time allocation impacts essential components that support this focus (i.e. deep reading, writing, creative inquiry, etc.)	March 2026	June 2026	Pending
4	Present findings and any recommendations.	Nov 2026	Dec 2026	Pending

Metrics for Success	
Comprehensive analysis completed with recommendations for improvement.	
Evidence that schedule design recommendations align with stated values and instructional goals	
Recommended master schedule changes presented	

Board/Community Message

“Time is the architecture of learning. By redesigning it with humanity in mind, we ensure that every student’s day reflects what we value most, connection, curiosity, and purpose.”





The Power of Presence: Elevating Performance and Presentation in the Age of AI

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Artificial Intelligence is transforming what it means to learn, create, and communicate. Machines can now write speeches, design visuals, even simulate emotion, yet they cannot stand in front of a room, connect with others, and move them.

That is the paradox of our moment: the more intelligent our technologies become, the more essential it is to cultivate the human capacity for presence, the ability to think on one's feet, collaborate with others, and communicate with authenticity and courage. Performance does that. It builds the habits of empathy, adaptability, and presence that define leadership and citizenship in an AI-powered world.

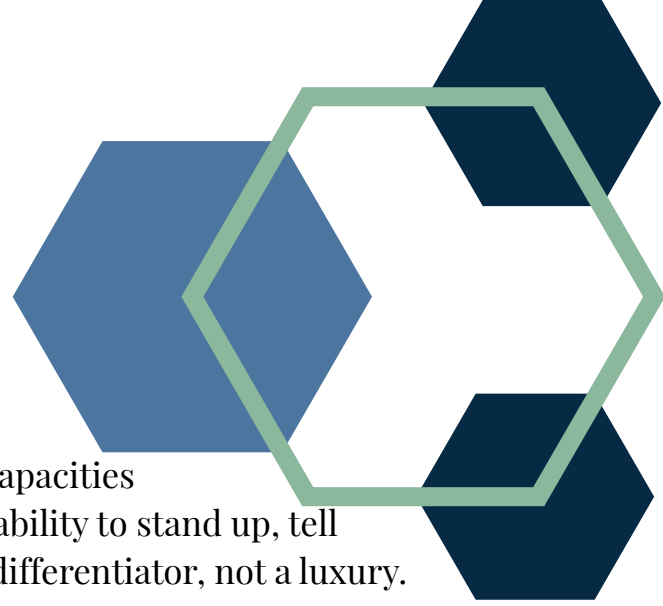
Performance is where these human capacities come alive. It is where intellect meets empathy, and preparation meets vulnerability. Westport already excels in theater and performance arts, where students learn empathy, collaboration, creativity, and composure under pressure. These are not extracurricular outcomes, they are essential human literacies.

Performance allows students to step inside another life, to feel what another person feels, and to communicate that truth to others. It transforms emotional intelligence from an abstract idea into a lived experience. Long before algorithms simulated reality, performance helped us understand it, holding a mirror to the human condition and inviting us to see ourselves in others.

Performance education is not enrichment. It is empowerment. It prepares students not only to communicate, but to connect, not only to succeed, but to lead, with voice, vision, and heart.

Every presentation and performance activity is an immersive experience in leadership:

- **Creativity and Improvisation** — Students learn to make meaning out of ambiguity, think on their feet, and bring imagination to constraint.
- **Collaboration and Trust** — Presentation and performance demands teamwork; no production or presentation succeeds in isolation.
- **Communication and Storytelling** — Students learn to speak with confidence, listen with precision, and convey ideas that move others.
- **Adaptability and Resilience** — Live presentation and performance teaches composure under pressure, iteration after failure, and the courage to try again.
- **Empathy and Emotional Intelligence** — Students learn to read emotion, understand nuance, and connect authentically, skills algorithms can model but never feel.



As AI grows more capable of analysis and design, these capacities will define the future of leadership and citizenship. The ability to stand up, tell a story, and connect human-to-human is now a critical differentiator, not a luxury.

Performance education is not enrichment. It is empowerment. It transforms empathy from an idea into a lived experience and prepares students not only to succeed, but to lead with voice, vision, and heart.

WHAT ARE WE GOING TO ACCOMPLISH?

We will elevate presentation and performance as essential components of a Westport education, foundational to the development of creativity, communication, empathy, and leadership.

Specifically, we will:

- Develop a K–12 Continuum of Performance and Presentation that integrates opportunities for students across multiple disciplines (i.e. English/Language Arts, Social Studies, World Language, Fine/Performing Arts, etc.) to create, perform, and present at every grade level.
- Broaden a districtwide definition of performance to include public speaking, storytelling, debate, design, music, and theater, anywhere students bring ideas to life for an audience.
- Identify exemplary programs in presentation, performing arts, storytelling, debate, and communication curricula in leading schools and higher education levels .
- Provide professional learning for educators on teaching presence, communication, and performance-based assessment.
- Provide time for presentation/performance experiences across disciplines.

When this work is complete, every Westport student will graduate not only as a Contributing Citizen (a Collaborator, Communicator, Critical Thinker, and Creator) but as a confident presenter, and performer, capable of using voice, empathy, and story to inspire others.

INITIATIVES

- Identify Exemplary Programs
- Design a K–12 Performance and Presentation Continuum
- Integrate AI Thoughtfully into Performance Education
- Designing Time for Presence: Rethinking Master Schedules



The Power of Presence: Elevating Performance and Presentation in the Age of AI

HOW WILL WE ACCOMPLISH THIS?

We will pursue five coordinated initiatives designed to align, expand, and celebrate performance and presentation as key components of student growth and leadership development:

1. **Identify Exemplary Programs** – Study leading K–12 and collegiate programs in public speaking, storytelling, debate, performing arts, and communication, to identify best practices and transferable models across the disciplines.
2. **Design a K–12 Performance and Presentation Continuum** – Create a district framework outlining performance and presentation expectations across grades and disciplines.
3. **Integrate AI Thoughtfully into Performance Education** – Use AI to enhance, not replace, creative processes while preserving authenticity, voice, and emotional connection.
4. **Designing Time for Presence: Rethinking Master Schedules**– Reexamine how instructional time is structured across K–12 to ensure that students have meaningful opportunities for creativity, reflection, and authentic presentation and performance.

Action Steps

1. Identify Exemplary Programs

- Conduct a study of leading schools and colleges recognized for excellence in performance and communication education, including public speaking, storytelling, debate, performing arts, and communication, to identify best practices and transferable models.
- Identify transferable practices that cultivate confidence, creativity, and authentic self-expression.
- Publish a district report, *The Power of Presence: Lessons from Exemplary Programs*.

2. Design a K–12 Performance and Presentation Continuum

- Convene educators, students, and community resources to design the continuum from elementary storytelling through high school leadership presentations.
- Define developmental benchmarks for creativity, collaboration, and presence.
- Integrate performance and presentation into the Contributing Citizens framework.

3. Integrate AI Thoughtfully into Performance Education

- Explore AI tools that enhance, not replace, creative processes of performance, storytelling, presentation, etc., while preserving authenticity, voice, and emotional connection.
- Develop professional learning for teachers on using AI to enhance creativity and feedback.
- Develop guidelines for AI use in performance and presentation contexts.

4. Designing Time for Presence: Rethinking Master Schedules

- Conduct a comprehensive time audit across all schools to analyze how instructional and transition time are distributed, identifying where opportunities for creativity, collaboration, presentation and performance can expand.
- Benchmark innovative scheduling models from exemplary schools that emphasize balance, project-based learning, and presentation-based assessment.
- Present recommendations and potential models to the Board that prioritize depth, balance, and human connection.



The Power of Presence: Elevating Performance and Presentation in the Age of AI

Initiative Name	Identify Exemplary Programs	Initiative Status:	Pending
Supports Objective	The Power of Presence: Elevating Performance and Presentation in the Age of AI		
Initiative Owner	Anna Mahon		
Initiative Summary	Conduct a study of leading K-12 schools and higher education institutions recognized for excellence in performance, communication, and storytelling. Identify best practices that cultivate creativity, confidence, and authentic expression, and translate these models into actionable strategies for Westport.		
Resources Required	Travel time, release time		

#	Milestones	Start Date	End Date	Status
1	Identify benchmarking partners (schools, universities, arts organizations).	Jan 2026	March 2026	Pending
2	Conduct interviews, visits, and research on instructional and cultural practices.	March 2026	Oct 2026	Pending
3	Publish district report <i>The Power of Presence: Lessons from Exemplary Programs</i> .	Jan 2027	March 2027	Pending

Metrics for Success	
Study completed and shared with faculty, leadership, and Board.	
Identified transferable practices implemented in district programs.	

Board/Community Message

“We are learning from the best to ensure Westport students are not only strong performers but powerful communicators, ready to lead with creativity, empathy, and authenticity.”

Initiative Name	Design a K-12 Performance and Presentation Continuum	Initiative Status:	Pending
Supports Objective	The Power of Presence: Elevating Performance and Presentation in the Age of AI		
Initiative Owner	Anna Mahon		
Initiative Summary	Develop a vertically aligned framework that integrates storytelling, presentation, and performance across all grades and disciplines. The continuum will provide a clear developmental progression of skills in creativity, collaboration, and presence, embedding performance into the Contributing Citizens framework.		
Resources Required	Development time, consultation		

#	Milestones	Start Date	End Date	Status
1	Convene a district design team including teachers, students, and community volunteers.	March 2026	June 2026	Pending
2	Define performance and presentation benchmarks by grade level.	June 2026	Jan 2027	Pending
3	Integrate benchmarks into district curriculum/learning experiences	Jan 2027	Aug 2027	Future

Metrics for Success	
Continuum developed	
Increased frequency of student-led presentations and various performances	

Board/Community Message

“Every student deserves the chance to speak, perform, and present, to find confidence and connection through authentic expression.”



The Power of Presence: Elevating Performance and Presentation in the Age of AI

Initiative Name	Integrate AI Thoughtfully into Performance Education	Initiative Status:	Pending
Supports Objective	The Power of Presence: Elevating Performance and Presentation in the Age of AI		
Initiative Owner	Anna Mahon, Curriculum Coordinators, ITL team		
Initiative Summary	Leverage AI tools to enhance creativity and reflection in performance and presentation while safeguarding the authenticity, emotion, and human connection that define live communication.		
Resources Required	Curriculum development time, release time, consultation		

#	Milestones	Start Date	End Date	Status
1	Explore AI tools that support storytelling, presenting findings, speechwriting, professional “pitches”, vocal/gesture coaching, etc.	March 2026	Ongoing	Pending
2	Develop professional learning opportunities for teachers on using AI responsibly and creatively.	August 2026	Ongoing	Pending
3	Publish Guidance for WPS faculty: AI in Performance and Presentation Guidelines.	June 2027	Aug 2027	Future

Metrics for Success	
Professional learning participation across all schools.	
Published district guidelines ensuring ethical AI use in performance education.	

Board/Community Message

“AI can amplify creativity, but only humans can perform it. Our students are learning to harness technology while staying rooted in authenticity and presence.”



The Power of Presence: Elevating Performance and Presentation in the Age of AI

Initiative Name	Designing Time for Humanity: Rethinking Master Schedules	Initiative Status:	Pending
Supports Objective	The Power of Presence: Elevating Performance and Presentation in the Age of AI		
Initiative Owner	Anna Mahon, Elementary and Middle School Administration		
Initiative Summary	Create districtwide opportunities for students to share their creativity, communication, and leadership through performance and presentation. Establish public showcases, exhibitions, and digital platforms that highlight student voice and the art of human connection.		
Resources Required	Consultation, Release Time		

#	Milestones	Start Date	End Date	Status
1	Conduct a comprehensive time audit across all schools to analyze how instructional and transition time are distributed.	Jan 2026	June 2026	Pending
2	Benchmark innovative and balanced master schedule models.	Jan 2026	June 2026	Pending
3	Evaluate how time allocation impacts essential components that support this focus (i.e. performance, presentation, etc.)	Jan 2026	June 2026	Pending
4	Present recommendations and potential models to the Board.	Nov 2026	Dec 2026	Pending

Metrics for Success	
Comprehensive analysis completed with recommendations for improvement.	
Evidence that schedule design recommendations align with stated values and instructional goals	
Recommended master schedule changes presented	

Board/Community Message

“Our students don’t just learn to present., they learn to connect. These experiences remind us that presence, empathy, and storytelling remain the heart of learning.”



Empowered Humans: Mindsets Strengthened, Leaders Developed

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

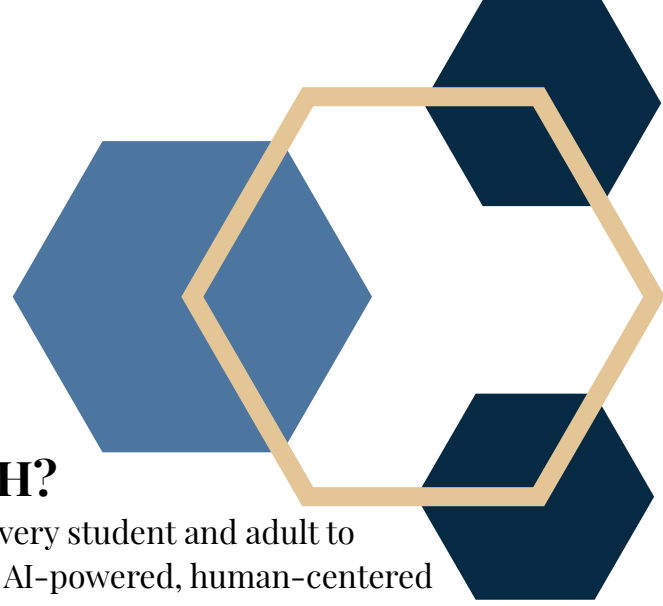
In an AI-accelerated world, the defining advantages our students will carry into adulthood are not technical skills alone, but the deeply human capacities that enable them to adapt, persevere, collaborate, and lead with purpose. As intelligent tools handle more tasks, students' mindsets, beliefs, and leadership abilities become even more consequential — the anchors of agency in a rapidly shifting landscape.

A growth mindset is the foundation of this agency. When students believe their abilities can expand through effort, practice, and feedback, they develop resilience, intrinsic motivation, and a willingness to take on challenges rather than avoid them. These beliefs shape how they respond when confronted with complex problems, new technologies, or unexpected setbacks — the everyday reality of the AI era. A fixed mindset, by contrast, restricts potential and leaves students less prepared for a world that demands continual learning.

Leadership development is the natural extension of a growth mindset in an AI-powered society. Leadership today is not about authority; it is the ability to influence, collaborate, communicate, and contribute to something larger than oneself. Every student — regardless of title, age, or aspiration — must lead their own life with clarity, empathy, ethical reasoning, and confidence. These are the human capacities that AI cannot replicate and that will differentiate our graduates in college, career, and civic life.

Schools play an irreplaceable role in shaping these capacities. Through the language adults use, the structures we design, the opportunities we create for agency, voice, and collaboration, and the explicit teaching of mindset and leadership principles, we profoundly influence how students view themselves and what they believe they are capable of becoming. In a time when AI can accelerate learning but cannot cultivate character, this human work becomes even more urgent.

If we want our students to thrive — not just in an AI-powered world but because of it — we must be intentional and systematic in developing growth mindsets and leadership capacities across every grade, every school, and every classroom. These are not enrichment skills. They are the core competencies that will allow our students to navigate complexity with confidence, leverage AI responsibly, and contribute meaningfully to their communities. To remain true to our vision of being AI Powered and Human Centered, we must commit to cultivating the beliefs and leadership skills that will empower every learner to shape the future, rather than be shaped by it.



WHAT ARE WE GOING TO ACCOMPLISH?

We will build a coherent, districtwide system that empowers every student and adult to develop the mindset and leadership capacities essential for an AI-powered, human-centered future. Our work will move beyond isolated practices to create a unified/systemic approach, one that shapes beliefs, strengthens agency, and elevates leadership at every level of the organization.

1. Align Our System With Growth Mindset Principles

By conducting an audit of district policies, procedures, and practices, and using a blend of AI-enabled analysis and thoughtful human review, we will identify misalignment and opportunities to strengthen language, expectations, and structures.

2. Elevate Educator Practice Through Professional Learning

We will equip educators with the tools, training, and inspiration to embed growth mindset strategies into daily instruction and professional practice.. AI tools will help teachers personalize feedback, analyze learning patterns, and support student resilience while preserving the irreplaceable human relationships at the heart of teaching.

3. Build a Leadership Development System for Students and Adults

We will create a comprehensive leadership development framework grounded in the competencies students and educators need to thrive in an AI-infused world. This includes piloting leadership curriculum units at the high school level, expanding student leadership opportunities, and returning to the exploration of the long term vision of launching a Center for Leadership Development for students.

4. Establish a Culture of Continuous Learning and Feedback

We will continuously evaluate the impact of this initiative through ongoing data collection from students, staff, and families. AI-assisted analytics, paired with human insight, will help us monitor progress, identify patterns, and refine our approach. This ongoing feedback loop will ensure the work remains dynamic, aligned to district goals, and responsive to the needs of our community.

INITIATIVES

- Growth Mindset Policy & Procedure Audit
- Supporting Growth Mindset Educators Within Westport Educator Evaluation and Support Plan (WEESP)
- Growth Mindset Professional Development
- Student Leadership Competency Development & Opportunities



Empowered Humans: Mindsets Strengthened, Leaders Developed

HOW WILL WE ACCOMPLISH THIS?

We will advance this work through four integrated phases:

- 1. Policy & Procedure Audit:** Use AI tools to analyze district documents for alignment with growth mindset and leadership principles, conducting human-led reviews, focus groups, and equity audits, publishing recommendations to strengthen systemwide alignment.
- 2. Educator Support & Professional Development:** Offering workshops, training, instructional tools, and coaching, integrating growth mindset and leadership practices into faculty professional goals, and providing AI supports for feedback generation, planning, and instructional reflection.
- 3. Leadership Development System:** Creating a K–12 leadership competency framework, piloting leadership curriculum modules at the high school level, expanding student opportunities, returning to the exploration of the development of a Center for Leadership for students.
- 4. Continuous Evaluation & Feedback:** Using AI-enabled analytics and human insight to monitor progress, collecting feedback from staff, students, and families, adjusting practices to ensure alignment with district goals and student needs.





Empowered Humans: Mindsets Strengthened, Leaders Developed

Action Steps

1. Policy & Procedure Audit

- Use AI tools to analyze policies, procedures, and district documents for alignment with growth mindset and leadership principles.
- Conduct human-led reviews, focus groups, and equity audits to capture lived experiences and identify barriers.
- Publish clear, actionable recommendations to strengthen systemwide alignment and coherence.

2. Educator Support & Professional Development

- Offer workshops, keynote speakers, model lessons, and coaching grounded in growth mindset research and leadership development.
- Embed growth mindset and leadership practices in professional goals, evaluations, and instructional routines.
- Provide AI supports for feedback generation, lesson planning, and analysis of student learning patterns to free educators for deeper human connection.

3. Leadership Development System

- Create a districtwide leadership competency framework defining the skills needed to thrive in an AI-powered world.
- Pilot leadership curriculum modules and expand student leadership opportunities across schools, classrooms, clubs, and community spaces.
- Launch the Center for Leadership Development, offering adult learning pathways for teachers, staff, and emerging leaders.

4. Continuous Evaluation & Feedback

- Use AI-enabled analytics to monitor patterns in engagement, feedback, and school climate, paired with qualitative insights from students, staff, and families.
- Collect regular feedback through surveys, focus groups, and reflective tools.
- Adjust practices and refine programming to ensure alignment with district goals and evolving student needs.

Initiative Name	Growth Mindset Policy & Procedure Audit	Initiative Status:	Pending
Supports Objective	Empowered Humans: Mindsets Strengthened, Leaders Developed		
Initiative Owner	Growth Mindset District Committee (in collaboration with Central Office and building-level administrators)		
Initiative Summary	The development of a growth mindset is affected by many practices in the school setting such as adult verbal behaviors, teacher pedagogy, school district policies, and explicit instruction in growth mindset tenets. This initiative will assess alignment of policies and practices with growth mindset, using both human expertise and AI-assisted tools.		
Resources Required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty/staff time (during and outside contractual hours) • Funding for release time • AI auditing tools / technical support • Summer work funding 		

#	Milestones	Start Date	End Date	Status
1	Develop a comprehensive system for auditing policies and practices through a growth mindset lens, incorporating AI tools to identify potential fixed mindset language or implicit biases where appropriate.	June 2025	August 2025	Complete
2	Identify current policies/practices that demonstrably support growth mindset principles, especially those informed by restorative practices.	June 2025	August 2026	Complete
3	Draft actionable, evidence-based recommendations for adjusting identified policies/practices to better align with a growth mindset framework.	June 2026	August 2026	Pending
4	Develop AI-supported auditing protocols for continuous updates	June 2026	August 2026	Pending
5	Implement updated policies and procedures district-wide	August 2026	June 2028	Pending

Metrics for Success	
Recommendations for policy/practice changes made	
Implementation of updated policies/practices	

Board/Community Message

“This initiative ensures that every policy and practice — from classroom feedback to district systems — reinforces our belief that effort, learning, and growth are always possible.”



Empowered Humans: Mindsets Strengthened, Leaders Developed

Initiative Name	Supporting Growth Mindset Educators Within Westport Educator Evaluation and Support Plan (WEESP)	Initiative Status:	Active
Supports Objective	Empowered Humans: Mindsets Strengthened, Leaders Developed		
Initiative Owner	Growth Mindset District Committee, Curriculum Coordinators, & PDEC (John Bayers & John Deluca)		
Initiative Summary	This initiative will provide a clear, user-friendly guide with examples of how educators can intentionally embed growth mindset strategies into their professional learning goals and classroom practice.		
Resources Required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summer work funding • Funding for release time 		

#	Milestones	Start Date	End Date	Status
1	Create an informational guide, including diverse examples of how a growth mindset can be explicitly embedded into practice, to support educators when selecting the growth mindset as a professional development goal.	June 2025	August 2025	Complete
2	Solicit feedback (informational guide) feedback from curriculum coordinators and PDEC committee, update document accordingly	October 2025	June 2026	In Progress
3	Pilot informational guide (educators)	October 2025	August 2026	In Progress
4	Gather and integrate feedback from educators and PDEC	April 2026	August 2026	Pending
5	Embed finalized guide into WEESP documentation	August 2026	Sept 2026	Pending

Metrics for Success	
WEESP plan fully updated	
Informational Guide Developed	

Board/Community Message

“We are equipping educators with clear, practical tools to bring growth mindset to life — making perseverance, feedback, and continuous learning part of every classroom.””

Initiative Name	Growth Mindset Professional Development	Initiative Status:	Active
Supports Objective	Empowered Humans: Mindsets Strengthened, Leaders Developed		
Initiative Owner	Growth Mindset Committee, Anna Mahon, PDEC committee		
Initiative Summary	Through keynote speakers, workshops, and ongoing PD sessions, staff will deepen their understanding of growth mindset, learn classroom applications, and practice strategies that emphasize effort, feedback, and process-focused instruction.		
Resources Required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speaker fees • External partnerships • Funding for release time 		

#	Milestones	Start Date	End Date	Status
1	Identify Growth Mindset speaker(s) and workshop series	August 2025	June 2028	In Progress
2	Growth Mindset Speaker - During district professional development days, staff will learn about the impact of process-based focused classrooms.	August 2025	June 2028	In Progress
3	Growth Mindset Centered Workshops - During district professional development days, staff will have opportunities to plan for utilization process-based focused strategies within classroom procedures, feedback, instruction and assessment.	August 2025	June 2028	In Progress
4	Evaluate impact and gather staff feedback for ongoing PD	August 2025	June 2028	In Progress
5	Exam instruction and assessments to align with a process based approach to learning.	August 2025	June 2028	In Progress
6	Curate and develop resources to support continuous learning of the growth mindset and synergistic concepts for educators, students and parents.	June 2026	June 2028	Pending

Metrics for Success	
Training delivered	
Resources curated and provided to faculty	

Board/Community Message

“Through professional learning in growth mindset, we are aligning our teaching practices to the future, emphasizing effort, feedback, and continuous growth as the hallmarks of learning.”



Empowered Humans: Mindsets Strengthened, Leaders Developed

Initiative Name	Student Leadership Competency Development & Opportunities	Initiative Status:	Pending
Supports Objective	Empowered Humans: Mindsets Strengthened, Leaders Developed		
Initiative Owner	District Leadership Development Committee (in partnership with building administrators and student representatives)		
Initiative Summary	This initiative will create a comprehensive, K-12 leadership development framework that defines essential competencies, identifies authentic opportunities for practice, and fosters student voice and agency. By aligning curriculum, extracurricular activities, and community partnerships, we will ensure every student has equitable access to leadership skill development and experiences.		
Resources Required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey Tools - Hanover Research • External Partnerships • Funding for stipend and release time 		

#	Milestones	Start Date	End Date	Status
1	Develop K-12 Leadership Competency Framework A formal, scaffolded K-12 framework defining leadership competencies at key developmental stages.	January 2026	August 2026	Pending
2	Develop and pilot Leadership Curriculum Development Units in high school Health Curriculum.	June 2026	June 2027	Pending
3	Expand student leadership districtwide by identifying additional opportunities (i.e. micro-leadership at classroom level, add formal leadership roles within current programs, increase student voice in school decisions, etc).	January 2026	June 2027	Pending
4	Re-launch Exploratory Committee to begin design of Center for Leadership.	January 2026	June 2027	Pending
5	Pilot "Lunch with a Leader" series 30 minute Q&A sessions during lunch periods	January 2026	June 2027	Pending

Metrics for Success	
K-12 Leadership Competency Framework Developed	
Leadership Curriculum Units Developed and Implemented	
Exploratory Committee re-launched for Center for Leadership	

Board/Community Message

"As AI accelerates change, we are grounding our students in the human strengths that endure — resilience, collaboration, and ethical leadership."