Washington Local Schools See Success

The Washington Local School District is enjoying success as the new school year is underway. They recently had three new schools built – Shoreland, Silver Creek, and Whitmer Middle School. In addition to new buildings, just two years ago they awarded their teaching and support staff one of the largest raises in state history.

Part of their continuing solvency is their proactive approach to expected, recurring costs, such as the expense of their half-million-dollar stadium turf. Synthetic turf generally has a useful life of roughly 8–12 years, so its eventual replacement was hardly a surprise. When the time came to replace it in 2024, the district's dedicated Permanent Improvement fund for stadium renovations, turf, and the scoreboard had already accumulated well over $600,000. Instead of waiting for a predictable expense to become a financial emergency, the district had spent years preparing for it. Strategic financial planning? What a concept!

What's the common thread for WLS success? They're run by Republicans and at least one conservative independent. In all, WLS board members are Brady Hall, Tom Illstrup, and Michael Murphy – all Republicans. Although not a registered Republican, Lauren Moore's record has proven very conservative. That leaves Mark Hughes, the lone Democrat, whose decade-long tenure has proven him to also be conservative in his voting style. Of course, before the communists took over a wing of the Democrat Party, many D's WERE conservative on fiscal issues.

Over the next decade, WLS is looking down the road to build a new high school, career tech center, and the final two elementaries. It'll take about $200 million total, with state money from the Ohio Facilities Construction Commission (OFCC) being leveraged to pay for 80 percent of the costs. If the board decides to go that route, a bond levy would cover the other 20 percent. They are currently in their longest span without a levy in district history, seven years, and also already have about $6 million earmarked for their local portion. The 7,000-student school system has a $110 million annual operating budget and finished the 2026 fiscal year with a surplus of approximately 2.5 million dollars. Another reason for WLS success? They had a penny pincher in Treasurer Jeff Fouke. He recently retired, but the board welcomed Jennifer Culbertson this past July; a money miser in her own right. Of eight school districts in Lucas County, WLS has maintained comparatively low spending per pupil, the third lowest just after Sylvania and Anthony Wayne, all while maintaining a substantial cash reserve and continuing to invest in district facilities.