

WCA Makes History with New High School

Weddington Christian Academy is proud to introduce the inaugural freshman and sophomore classes.

WCA Makes History

Written by Lyla Barnes, Chase Casale, Presley Dreyfus, Kayla Jones, Kaylee Lykins and Gavin Navey.

Weddington Christian Academy's (WCA) new high school is a fulfilled vision nearly ten years in the making.

Adell Keen, Head of School at WCA, has been a part of the school for 17 years. The original idea of a high school started in 2018. She says, "We believe that we were graduating exceptional eighth-grade students, and wanted to continue serving and helping them grow into great people."

Keen acknowledged the staff's hope and expectations for the future high school grades, sharing their openness to new, innovative ideas to give students the best high school experience WCA has to offer.

Keen spoke on what the first freshmen class meant to her and the new history of WCA. She quoted, "I love having the opportunity of two high school grades this year. Last year was extra special knowing that we would officially have our first graduating class in 2028, and we're beyond excited to continue this year with another great class joining our high school."

She shared her expectations, wanting the future high school classes to have just as much success as the first class of '28. "I want what started with the first freshman class to prosper into the entire four grades of high school. We want that spirit and adventure to graduate through classes for many years. And we hope all of our students will have the same hearts, minds, and spirit as our class of '28 for years to come."

Greg Barkman, the new principal of WCA's upper school, started June 2. Barkman shared that he learned about the open position for principal through his wife, Chrissy Barkman, who has worked at WCA for the past few years. Barkman explained that he is slowly adjusting and still "learning the ropes" as he is in his first year at WCA.

Barkman discussed how God had prepared him for this new role and he said, "Using past experiences God takes us through things in a certain way to prepare us."

Barkman elaborated on how God had called him to WCA. "I've felt strongly called to every teaching position except for the first two, until God started moving me differently in my heart. Last year around this time I felt restless in my heart wanting something different. Then I found WCA and prayed about it."

Barkman has over 15 years of experience in education and he has been using his past experiences to navigate this year. He chose to focus on building connections with students before applying anything new to the school.

He also confessed that he had been a little nervous for the high school retreat to Camp Thunderbird in August, not knowing what to expect. Barkman assured that he was no longer nervous now that he had gotten to know the students better. He said, "I like that they can think more abstractly. That concrete thinking changes in high school along with humor changing, becoming more complex. Highschoolers can understand sarcasm and have deeper conversations."

When asked about his plans for the students later in the year, Barkman explained that this first year he will follow what has been done in previous years. Barkman says that as time continues he plans to focus on how he can affect the culture of the new high school while also building connections as he settles into his new role.

Adding the high school grades was one big change, and that required hiring additional high school staff. One individual recently employed at WCA was the upper school office administrator, Mary Beth Roth. She gave her insight on her new role at WCA and the plans for the years to come. Roth quoted, "I'm very excited to be a part of the staff. I look forward to supporting staff as we serve students together."

Upon taking this new position at WCA, Roth shared updates and information on programs such as the National Beta Club, Wings of

Worship Choir, Hawk Honor Guard, and Student Government. Roth mentioned that as WCA progresses in the growth of the high school, new additions will be available. Some additions include dual enrollment, continuation of the PLACED program, and a college guidance program.

Roth described the changes WCA has planned for high school to differentiate from middle school. High school plans include annual retreats to Camp Thunderbird and the return of Freshman Fridays—now reimagined as High School Happenings. Roth ended with final thoughts on the high school, saying, "I'm very excited…we officially have 29 students in high school. I'm looking forward to growth over the next few years."

Another important piece for the high school is to have a competitive athletic program. Athletic Director and Physical Education Coach Jared Sanders described the things to look forward to during this school year. Sanders explained how the progression in WCA's sports program will play a role in the success of the new high school. Sanders quoted, "First, we have to make sure they have the equipment, which we have already done. We ordered new volleyball equipment and new uniforms for all the sports teams. Second, we put them in more competitive positions."

With sports being covered, attention has also been set on the teachers and how they will lead kids through their studies.

Angie Barker has been a teacher at Weddington Christian Academy for four years and she teaches middle school science. She said, "At Weddington Christian Academy, a lot of things have made me a better person. The school has impacted my life by helping me grow closer to the Lord because I can freely come to school everyday and talk about God and share the gospel to every one of the students. It has helped me make a connection and grow closer to them. WCA has recently started making high school classes and I am very excited about it. I feel like it is a great look for this school and I enjoy looking down and seeing this school grow from the roots all the way to the top."

WCA is working to build the high school from the lower grades up.

Alexus Leebrick, the current Lower School Principal, has served at WCA for over three years and started as a kindergarten teacher. Before coming to WCA, she taught at a public school. She told us that serving a smaller number of students at WCA provided a very different dynamic compared to public schools. With fewer students, teachers are able to form deeper relationships.

Stepping into the 2025-2026 school year, Leebrick became the Lower School Principal. As principal, she has a lot more responsibilities, including communicating with the families and building trust with them. Even though she has more responsibility, she is rewarded with getting to meet new people and being able to peek into classes and see the different styles of teaching. She talks about how she prepares the lower school students for middle and eventually high school. Sharing more details about her plans as principal, Leebrick stated,

"We recently started a new curriculum which focuses on a shift from learning to read to reading to learn. This will help students with learning from textbooks in middle and high school."

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Student Spotlights

First Grade students at WCA were interviewed and asked what they thought of a high school. Many responses included how high school is a lot of hard work with studying, learning and "super smart" people as well as exciting new classes like Biology. They also mentioned many sports they are excited for, like Basketball, Soccer, and Volleyball. The students were then asked what they thought about WCA having its own high school. They responded, "I think it's good that we have a high school. It sounds cool and fun, while still being hard work."

Finally the first graders were asked if they were excited and ready for high school, and while some students were nervous, the majority sounded excited for the transition to high school. One student said, " I am excited to go to high school so I can play more sports and drive." Most of the students seemed to agree with this statement and sounded ready and thrilled to grow up and transition to WCA's high school.

The current sixth graders also shared their opinions. The ways they envisioned high school included more responsibility, larger homework loads, stricter punishments, the necessity of always being prepared, and serious conversations about college. Some things they hoped for in high school included advanced sports and welcoming and dedicated teachers. The middle schoolers also gave insight into whether or not they want to stay for high school. Those who wished to continue at WCA liked the safe, Christian environment and the emphasis on learning more about Christ. Others reasoned that tuition for high school would cause financial issues, making it hard to continue at WCA. Considering the positives and negatives, most sixth graders hope to attend WCA's high school in the future.

The eighth grade class has some thoughts on the new high school as well. They were asked about what things they are apprehensive about and some

challenges, as well as things they are looking forward to. Some of the most common responses for worries were moving buildings, failing classes, preparing for college, SAT/ACT's, and getting older. While there are always concerns with significant transitions, eighth graders are already preparing to make the transition easier.

One of the ways they're being prepared is the constant effort from the teachers to make the transition easy. Some exciting things they are looking forward to are honors classes with more detailed subjects, fun field trips, and spirit weeks with homecoming. Finally, they were asked about how they will make an impact and be a good influence for our high school. Some responses were, "I want to be a role model to the younger kids", and "We can look up to the current highschoolers." We are so excited to see how they will grow and become new leaders!

Freshman Input

The freshman class of 2029 shared their thoughts on the current school year. The ninth graders described their feelings about becoming high schoolers, including the intimidating conversations about college and taking deeper dives into planning their academic futures. They were content with the progress of the year, aside from the common complaint of Physical Education every day. The freshman shared their thoughts on things they enjoy, changes they've noticed, things they're looking forward to, and returning students explaining why they stayed.

Wesley Pettengill, who has been a WCA student for ten years, responded,"I've liked the changes in leadership, and we've improved on guidance."

New student Alex Jooste also commented, "I enjoyed going on the high school retreat to Camp Thunderbird, the people, and Chef Bob! He's cool too."

Eden Garvey shared what she liked about WCA during her first year. "I like how nice all of the students are and my classes are okay. Camp Thunderbird was really enjoyable which makes it the highlight of my year so far…I am mostly looking forward to choosing my electives that I want to do and not having PE everyday."

Returning student Mary Chandler Peters, commented on her reasons for choosing WCA for high school. Peters described, "I stayed at WCA because I really loved the community it provided as well as all of the friends that I made here. I also loved the teachers and couldn't imagine myself anywhere else!"

Alongside his classmates, Micah Roth, who has been a WCA student for eight years, also contributed his thoughts. Roth stated, "The high school is different because it gives students more opportunities and independence."

Staying at WCA, Sam Reeder joined the freshman class of 2029. He shared his opinion on the year and what he hoped it would bring. Reeder claimed, “I’m excited for more events like Camp Thunderbird in the future, I’m also curious on how my high school career will affect my life after school. Like extracurriculars, scholarships, and clubs.”

Concluding Thoughts

After starting this new journey with prayers and preparation, the new high school is finally here. Because of the willingness to step out in faith, WCA will walk alongside these students as staff and students work together to create an academically strong and Christ-centered high school that will leave an eternal impact while preparing students for their future. While there are growing pains with every new step, the classes of ‘28 and ‘29 are excited for their high school journey.