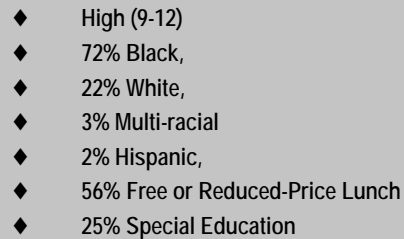


## Western Hills University High School

2144 Ferguson Rd.  
Cincinnati, Ohio 45238  
Dr. Stephanie Morton, Principal

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Western Hills University High School (WHUHS) has been successful in helping its students, predominantly from low-income families, graduate and enter postsecondary training programs or college. The school, located on the west side of Cincinnati, Ohio, began as Western Hills High School in 1928. Originally a comprehensive high school serving grades seven through twelve, in fall 2002, the large high school was divided into three small schools as part of the Cincinnati City School District's initiative to offer high schools of choice. In 2008-2009, high school students in the district could choose from 16 high schools with 20 program options.

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- ◆ High (9-12)
  - ◆ 72% Black,
  - ◆ 22% White,
  - ◆ 3% Multi-racial
  - ◆ 2% Hispanic,
  - ◆ 56% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch
  - ◆ 25% Special Education

In this restructuring, Western Hills took on a new identity as Western Hills University High School, a small high school serving approximately 700 students with a clearly defined mission to prepare students for graduation and postsecondary education and training. WHUHS graduated its first senior class in spring 2005. Walking through the hallways of WHUHS, it is evident that the college-going culture permeates every aspect of the school from the college banners posted in the classrooms to the students congregating in the College Access Center at lunch. On Fridays, students enthusiastically take a break from the school uniform to wear college apparel. The school's mascot, Mustangs, is used to reinforce the school's expectations; referred to as the "Mustangs' Mantra" –

- Make good decisions
- Use appropriate language
- Stay in school and be on time
- Talk with respect
- Ask for help
- No cell phones
- Graduation is our goal
- Stay focused on school

When entering the building, WHUHS students check in with an administrator at the door and move quickly to their own section of the building. Students dress in uniforms and conform to a culture that is calm, focused, and orderly. They move quietly to their first class, known in the school as the "first bell."

Western Hills University High School is a structured and disciplined, team-based environment, focused on increasing the achievement of every student. Both student and teacher responsibilities are clearly articulated and reviewed throughout the year. Once a month, each grade level gathers in the large auditorium for the Ways and Means

Assembly where expectations and responsibilities are reviewed. Ninth graders have minimal freedom as they move as a group to their next “bell.” To leave class, a student must have a signed Hallway Passport, which is contained in their official WHUHS Student Handbook and Assignment Notebook. The staff emphasizes this spiral-bound notebook as an essential organizational tool necessary in school and in life.

### **Academic Program**

WHUHS organizes its ninth and tenth grade academic program to focus on teaching the standards in the core subject areas—English, mathematics, science, and social studies—to prepare students to pass the Ohio Graduation Tests (OGT) in each subject. Students are organized into teams; all students on the team have the same core subject teachers and move from class to class as a group. To extend the emphasis on postsecondary opportunities, teams are named after colleges in Ohio such as the Ohio State Team or the Xavier Team. The school day is divided into five bells or class periods. In ninth grade, four bells are for classes in the core subjects while the fifth bell is for academic support. This “flex” bell schedule provides time for students to have a double-dose of each core subject at least one day per week. This time can be used to strengthen students’ skills or to provide enrichment. In tenth grade, students take Spanish during the fifth bell.

In grades 11 and 12, students have greater opportunities for elective classes such as art, drama, Consumer Math, Personal Finance, botany, zoology, Environmental Science, and Pre-calculus. Students also participate in a weekly College Seminar class during the “flex” bell. In seminars, students have the opportunity to engage in discussions and research on topics identified by the teachers. Seminars are designed to create the experience of a college class rich with discussion and thought-provoking questions.

The teachers on each team work collaboratively to provide consistency in academic and behavior expectations. Each team of teachers meets daily during its common team planning period to plan instruction and to review student progress. The team must submit minutes of its meetings to the principal each week. This time is also used to meet individually with students to discuss progress and plan for any additional support needed. Teams maintain a team portfolio that includes minutes of the team meetings and appropriate documentation that reflects implementation of the school’s mission and vision and the team’s goals and strategies for the year.

The principal holds teachers to a high level of accountability. As the assistant principal or principal conducts classroom walkthroughs, teachers must have lesson plans available for their review including the indicator taught, procedures, assessments, and materials to be used in the lesson. All plans must be kept together to see progression over time in lessons taught and content covered. The school’s philosophy—quality over quantity, conceptual understanding, active student involvement, skill mastery, research-based instructional strategies, and higher level questioning—must be reflected and visible in daily instruction.

Credit deficiencies are remediated via After School Tutoring, the 3rd Semester (summer school), or Independent Study. Daily academic support is provided through the OGT Club, the OGT Study Hall (for 12th graders), after school, and during the “flex” bell.

## College-Going and Career Exploration Culture

Western Hills University High School's culture emphasizes college and postsecondary training. As such, eighth-grade students are invited to participate in a Summer Bridge Program. The bridge program introduces the students to the school, its expectations, and the college-going culture through visits to Xavier University and Northern Kentucky University. Students also take courses to help their academic transition to high school.

Students have additional opportunities to learn about college and gain a small taste of life in college through the Summer Institutes. These institutes are offered to WHUHS students after ninth, tenth, and eleventh grades. Students take classes on college campuses such as Spanish, English, and mathematics. They can also earn physical education credits during the summer institutes.

As students move into their junior and senior years, there is an increased focus on preparing them for postsecondary opportunities. The school sponsors College Fairs where students and their parents can talk with representatives from colleges in Ohio and nearby Kentucky. They learn about the admissions' procedures and requirements and collect information about each college or training program. The school also offers a Life and Career Planning course for students with disabilities.

At lunch, seniors often congregate in the College Access Center adjacent to the cafeteria. Students can browse through college catalogs, find out information about financial aid opportunities, and chat with the school's Scholarship Coordinator. The school also offers extensive support to students and families on ACT and SAT registration and testing procedures and on completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) forms.

The Scholarship Coordinator works with each senior to guide them through the entire process from the beginning of the senior year through the summer after graduation. The coordinator also oversees the school's scholarship program. Through philanthropic donations, the school offers either a \$4,000 college scholarship or a \$500 book scholarship to any graduating senior that maintains a 2.5 grade point average, attends the Summer Bridge Institute between eighth and ninth grades and at least two additional summer institutes, and completes the college preparatory courses.

## Social-Emotional Support Programs

Going beyond the academic needs of its students, WHUHS also provides a range of programs to meet the social and emotional needs of students. For example, Young Women Writing for Change is a weekly writing course for the young women at the school. Through the medium of writing, the students learn self-expression, self-reflection, and self-advocacy.

For those students that need to work on self-control, there is a Controlling Myself program that assists students in the management of anger, impulses, and peer-adult conflicts. The school requires students who have difficulty with anger control to participate in the class. The students engage in Yoga lessons as a positive way to reduce tension.

The school psychologist works closely with the Campus Family Support Manager to assist students and families with any non-academic barriers to success. Together with

the Office of Family Support, they started several new activities and projects. For example, with a great deal of student enthusiasm, the office helped students start a school choir and a service-oriented club—Key Club. They also initiated a new mentoring program for students and parenting classes. The community also supports the students at WHUHS through Lighthouse Youth Services. This organization employs a full-time therapist to offer counseling services to individuals and groups of student for mental health issues. Faces without Places helps homeless students find suitable housing.

Students at WHUHS frequently express their appreciation for the school and its college-going culture. Seniors, in particular, comment on the support that they received and the ways that it made a difference for them. The school's focus on setting high expectations, establishing a disciplined but personalized learning environment, and preparing students for graduation and beyond has enabled many of these seniors to say that they are the first in their families to make it to twelfth-grade and to plan to attend college.

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