

# Whitewater Unified (Wisconsin) School District's Career and Academic Portfolio

## Pathways Spotlight Brief

pathways  
resource center

Joel R. Malin, with Collaborating Educator Pamela Sonmor-Wintz

### Whitewater Unified School District

Grade Levels: K-12  
Students: 1,948

Whitewater Unified School District (WUSD) is located in Whitewater, Wisconsin, near the southern portion of the Kettle Moraine State Forest and about 50 miles southeast of Madison. The district includes five schools. Whitewater High School (WHS) serves nearly 525 students in grades 9-12. Approximately 75% of WHS students identify as White, with 20% identifying as Hispanic, 2% Asian, 1% Black, 0.5% American Indian/Alaskan Native, and 0.5% two or more races. About 31% of WHS students are eligible for free or reduced price lunch. WHS students with an average ACT composite score of 23.8 (maximum score 36) in 2014 outpaced Wisconsin students overall, whose average score was 22.2. For additional information regarding Whitewater Unified School District or WHS, please visit the district's website: <http://www.whs.wvusd.org/>

### Educator Contact:

Pamela Sonmor-Wintz  
School Counselor and Coordinator of Counseling Services  
Whitewater High School  
Email: [psonmorwintz@wvusd.org](mailto:psonmorwintz@wvusd.org)  
Phone: (262) 472-8113



### Whitewater Unified School District's Career and Academic Portfolio Program

This brief describes WUSD's Career and Academic Portfolio Program, part of the comprehensive Individualized Learning Planning in which all WHS students (grades 9-12) participate.

### Supporting Students' College and Career Readiness

Beginning with the class of 2013, all graduating students complete the district's Career and Academic Portfolio Program, including a culminating presentation, as part of their individualized learning plan (ILP) activities. In WUSD and in Wisconsin, these plans are called "Academic and Career Plans" (ACPs). Students begin working on their ACPs and portfolios in grade 9, and prior to graduating they present their plans to a group, which typically includes a teacher, community member, family, and other guests. Upon completing the presentation, answering questions, and engaging in discussion, students receive a certificate from the school principal.

The Career and Academic Portfolio Program at Whitewater High School was created by a team of educators, including an administrator, school counselor, parents, and high school students. This leadership team met on a monthly basis during a two-year period of research and collaboration from 2006-2008 to review data and establish policies and procedures designed to improve student achievement. Pamela Sonmor-Wintz, school counselor, led the development of the program with the goal of helping students develop a greater sense of intrinsic motivation and purposeful learning through career and academic planning while providing an opportunity for students to showcase examples of their best work throughout high school. Ms. Sonmor-Wintz brought in guest speakers and shared information about portfolio programs in neighboring school districts to inspire ideas. The leadership team created a vision for the program, which included a financial component, fitness plan, and hours of service so WHS students would be encouraged to use their knowledge and skills to give back to their school and community. Career Cruising was chosen for its comprehensive career exploration program and unique portfolio program components. Pamela Sonmor-Wintz and members of the team presented their proposal to the school board in 2008 and the program became a requirement for graduation.

Freshmen learn about program requirement in a business class called "Future Connections." Students learn how to use the Career Cruising career exploration program and begin working on career and academic portfolios by completing interest surveys and identifying potential careers. They learn how to write reflections about their best coursework and are asked to upload meaningful artifacts.



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AT ILLINOIS

Students set achievement goals and create a four-year academic plan designed to help them graduate from high school, gain admission to college, and/or meet work requirements. Portfolio development workshops are offered throughout the year so students can work on their portfolios. Students also are given the opportunity to create an informative presentation about their career and academic portfolios during Speech class in grade 11 or 12. Seniors show their completed portfolios to their homeroom teachers, who use a checklist to verify that the minimum requirements have been met, and present their portfolios to teachers, community members, and invited guests during a 30-minute presentation before graduation. A comprehensive guide is available at: <http://www.whs.wvusd.org/page/2648>

### Impact

Because the program is relatively new, long-term impact data are still emerging. Still, there is much reason to expect positive benefits. Participating students may be more focused and motivated—perhaps resulting in better school performance—and more purposeful in planning for their futures and better prepared for postsecondary transitions. WHS educators are highly encouraged by survey results suggesting that multiple stakeholders perceive benefits of the program. For instance, 92% of the class of 2013 students and 100% of parents, teachers, and community members agreed or strongly agreed that career and academic portfolios helped students to connect their interests to career options. Also, 89% of students and 97%+ of adults believed career plans helped them to see the importance of preparing for the future and doing well in high school, and 96% reported feeling confident in their ability to succeed in their chosen career path. WHS educators are heartened but not complacent; they continue to collect data, reflect upon results, and improve their programming.

### Key Points

As Ms. Sonmor-Wintz reflected, the strength of the ILP lies in the collaboration that occurred during program development and support from the administration, school board, and community. She stressed the payoff of working with a leadership team comprised of various stakeholders, which helped with idea-generation, sharing of responsibilities, and gaining widespread buy-in. She noted that WHS has had two highly supportive principals who were open to new ideas throughout the development process. Ms. Sonmor-Wintz also emphasized the importance of making the portfolio as useful as possible. For instance, when students submit scholarship applications and information for the National Honor Society selection process, they are asked to print out information from their resume (My Plan) section as a supplement to the common scholarship application. Students and educators have found this to be very helpful.

### Program Notes

Career Cruising is integral to WHS electronic portfolio and ILP process, so educators should explore this resource or a similar tool. ILPs are also extremely useful to WHS counselors, who review them with students during conferences and see them as “a great starting point” for discussing careers. Ms. Sonmor-Wintz believes the favorable student-to-counselor ratio (approximately 250 to 1) enables each student to meet with a counselor for an individual planning conference at least annually.

***“Our Career and Academic Portfolio Program has had a large positive impact on the students, their parents, and the community of Whitewater...And, a great time has been had by all!”***

~Ms. Sonmor-Wintz, School Counselor and Coordinator of Counseling Services, Whitewater High School

---

Illinois State Board of Education  
100 North First Street  
Springfield, IL 62777-0001  
[www.isbe.net](http://www.isbe.net)



This publication was prepared pursuant to a contract from the Illinois State Board of Education and is funded 100% through the federal Race to the Top grant. The total amount of federal funding involved is \$254.29, which represents 100% of the cost of producing the publication.

An Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Employer

Printed by the authority of the State of Illinois, July 2015 (400 copies, ISBE Contract Number 2012-06779).

James T. Meeks, Chair  
Tony Smith, Ph.D., Superintendent

## PATHWAYS RESOURCE CENTER

[www.pathways.illinois.edu](http://www.pathways.illinois.edu)

The mission of the PRC is to provide resources and supports to secondary and postsecondary institutions, employers, communities, and other partners as they engage in successful and sustainable pathways for students from secondary, to postsecondary, to careers.