

**West Middle School: The Rock Academy  
Program Overview**

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In February 2017, a group of Shelby County Public School teachers and staff traveled to Waukesha, Wisconsin to visit a high school that implemented competency-based education. On the bus ride home, after visiting the school, a small group of teachers from Shelby County's West Middle School started dreaming and planning. Considering their students, their families, and our district's mission and vision, the teachers were excited to imagine how they could transform their school. The team dreamed of eliminating the idea of a grade level and of identifying students by IEPs and GSPs. They wanted all students together in a learning environment where academics reigned but relationships and soft skills also played an important role in the development and learning of the child. They envisioned our district's Profile of a Graduate driving the work they would do with students through problem-based learning, exhibitions and defenses of learning. On that bus, the teachers began to transform the way they thought about teaching and their dream was to change the way students think about learning. Their goal is to build a foundation of tomorrow's leaders and innovators through personalized learning. West Middle School's vision is to grow students academically, socially, and emotionally by giving access to a rich personalized learning experience for all. This goal and this vision was born on the bus.

By Fall of 2017 that group of teachers welcomed their first diverse, multi-level group of 6th and 7th graders into "The Rock Academy." The Rock has since grown to welcome 6th, 7th and 8th graders working at their own pace mastering competencies and standards. West Middle School, for the 2019 - 2020 school year has 674 students, 180 of those students are in the Rock Academy. Moreover, the school has continued their transformation with grade levels that incorporate competency-based learning and professional development and leadership training into their 6th grade team, the Centerstone, their 7th grade team, the Keystone, and the 8th grade team, the Capstone.

feels comfortable to grow, learns to express their opinions and respect those of others while meeting the competencies required of the Profile. Students meet in the morning to set goals and plan for the day. Some of the components of education in The Rock include the following:

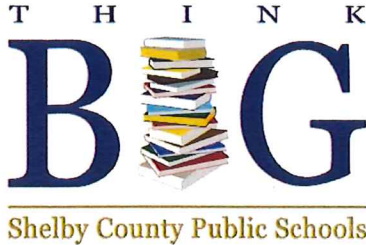
- An **advisory period** where students receive academic and social support. They have a “go to” adult who assists the students in creating a variety of goals and then assist them in working toward them.
- **Daily Personalized Learning Time** is a time when students can get extra help or dig deeper in their current learning. They can choose to work on their passion projects, project-based learning, or prepare for an exhibition or defense of learning.
- Students experience the power of servant leadership through **service projects**. Teachers have established partnerships with community organizations and local elementary schools. Students have served at the local EMS and Fire Stations, a philanthropy known as “A Place to Sleep,” which provides bed and bedding to children in need, The Backpack Project, which feeds children on the weekends, farms and landscaping organizations, and many more. The list of partnerships continues to grow as students realize their passions.
- Students participate in at least one **Public Exhibition** a year. This may grow in the future. Students present their learning to the public in creative ways.
- Our **Profile of a Graduate** asks students to work toward becoming an Effective Communicator, an Inspired Innovator, a Critical Thinker, a Global Citizen, a Lifelong Learner and a Responsible Collaborator. At the end of the school year, our students will defend their learning and how they grew in two or more of these competencies in a **Defense of Learning** which includes school and community adjudicators.
- The Rock does not look like a traditional learning space. **Flexible Seating** is offered by most teachers and will look different in each classroom. It may sound simple, but offering a student a choice in where they will sit and how they will work makes a big difference to a middle schooler.
- **Guest speakers** and **field trips** are also part of the learning process in the Rock. They have visited and been visited by Senators and Representatives, local business owners, educators, farmers, and many others who help students connect to the outside world.

The Shelby County Board of Education has allocated funding for professional development in the areas of competency-based education and personalized learning. Teachers have traveled to other school districts to see what works and what does not work. The BOE supports laboratory classrooms allowing other teachers in the district to see what’s happening at The Rock and allows other districts in Kentucky to visit as well. The encouragement of dispositional hiring and support in flexible scheduling has been strong. School board members participate in exhibition nights, in defenses of learning, and as guest speakers. The Rock has presented their successes to the board and the students of The Rock have brought their presentations to the board meetings as well.

MAP data presented by Principal Stivers demonstrates that between Fall of 2017 and Spring of 2019 students enrolled in The Rock (which included only 6th and 7th grade students for 2017 -

2018) increased their MAP scores an average of 14.4 percent. Students who were identified as Novice, Apprentice, Proficient and Distinguished all demonstrated substantial growth. While in The Rock, 73% of the 6th grade students scored proficient or distinguished in Reading during the 2017 - 2018 year with 96.30% of the 6th grade students demonstrating growth overall. In 6th grade Math, 80.30% of the students demonstrated growth with 49% scoring proficient or distinguished in Math. In 7th grade Reading, 70% of students scored in the proficient/distinguished areas with 72.73% demonstrating growth overall. In 7th grade Math, 54% of the students scored in the proficient/distinguished areas with an overall growth seen in 80.30% of the students.

Shelby County Public Schools wishes to nominate West Middle School and The Rock Academy for the KSBA Peak Award. We are proud of this teacher driven effort to reach students through personalized learning. Having seen the success of the Rock, the teachers and administration at WMS are working toward implementation of the ideas and processes used by the Rock throughout the whole building. They believe that you shouldn't have to apply for a great personalized learning experience. The dedication and commitment to transforming the public school education experience and enhancing student learning skills in Shelby County is seen at WMS in the teachers, the administration, through parental support, through the support of the Board of Education and our community.



PEAK AWARD  
Kentucky School Boards Association  
Attn: Matt McCarty  
260 Democrat Drive  
Frankfort, KY 40601

Mr. McCarty,


It is with excitement and honor that the Shelby County Board of Education presents this letter of support for the Shelby County West Middle School's "The Rock" academic program. We believe that this program holds the attributes of academic excellence, impact on students' development, and academic innovation that the PEAK AWARD is designed to recognize.

Through innovative utilization of staffing allocations provided by the Board, minor facility usage redesign that fit within the confines of the District Facility Plan, and collective planning with the faculty and staff of West Middle, the school has implemented an educational gem that has caught the attention of students and parents across the community. As a Board, each member has had opportunity to see demonstrations of student development, growth in subject matter, and improved abilities to speak to peers, faculty, and the public, by visiting "The Rock" at West Middle.

This program allows for students, of all demographics, to take part in academically rigorous content. Instruction is provided through traditional lecture and texts, includes technological solutions to support the lecture and text, and then culminates in project-based learning opportunities for the students to put the mastery of content into a demonstratable presentation to prove competency. By design, West Middle School has taken the Board approved Profile of a Graduate and ensured a grading/feedback system is utilized during these competency-based culminating events.

We, as a Board, are proud of the program and see this innovative program taking hold in other schools across our School District. Please take time to review our District's submission and give strong consideration for our West Middle Schools program.

Sincerely yours,

  
Andrew Cline Joanna Freels Allen Phillips Brenda Jackson Sonja Blackburn  
Shelby County Board of Education Members

**Andrew H. Cline, Board Chairman**  
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Shelbyville, KY 40065  
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September 16, 2019

Angela Rice  
134 GrayHill CT  
Shelbyville, KY 40065

Dear KSBA PEAK Award Reviewers,

I am writing this letter in support of Shelby County West Middle School's ROCK Program. My son Kaleb has been part of the ROCK since it started at West Middle the 2017-2018 school year.

I cannot express to you enough how much I feel the ROCK has changed the course of my son's educational career. When Kaleb left the 5<sup>th</sup> Grade, the Principal told us he had a Math Learning Disability and he was headed towards an Individual Education Plan (IEP). Kaleb's teacher at the time had heard about the new program being offered at West Middle and told me she felt this "style" of learning would be the best fit for Kaleb. We applied and Kaleb was accepted into the program for his 6<sup>th</sup> Grade year.

This is where the transformation began! This program is designed in such a way that my son, who happens to not do well in Math, is in a program that allows him to learn at his own pace and his own way. Kaleb's 6<sup>th</sup> Grade year he had four different Math teachers that were working with him throughout the week. He was able to excel in the subjects he was doing well in without hesitation and still receive the individual help he needed in the subject of Math; therefore it was determined that an IEP was not needed. Intervention continued and Kaleb was brought-up to grade level in Math. Middle school is not easy and it can be even harder for a student that is not on the same academic level as their peers. The ROCK allowed Kaleb to learn without judgement or time restrictions and that is amazing beyond words!

Now that I have talked about the academic part for my son, let me talk about the uniqueness of the ROCK. The rooms are set up in a way that Kaleb can go read on a couch or sit at a café' style-table to do his work. I feel this arrangement helps my son feel more comfortable and he can get the privacy he needs/wants when doing his work. The ROCK has Exhibitions that have become one of the highlights of my husband and I's year. We have watched Kaleb grow so much confidence and I have seen that confidence continue to grow over the past two years. These kids, Kaleb included, work so hard and are so passionate about the research they have done before the big night; it is amazing to witness. One of my favorite parts is when the student explains what part of Profile of a Graduate they picked and why. I love to hear students explain how they want to better themselves in a particular area.

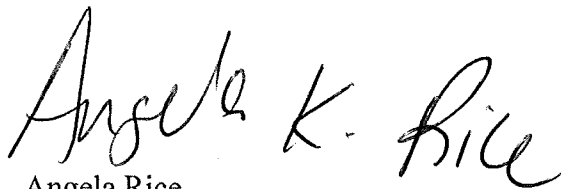
The ROCK allows each student to have an advisor that they meet with each week. This has become a part of my son's week that I'm not sure he could do without. He has learned to become accountable for his work and has not fallen behind and I feel it is because he knows he has a meeting each week to make sure/discuss his assignments. This is also a time where he can discuss any issues good/bad that he has going on. This meeting makes him feel valued as a

student and that is EXTREMELY important, especially at the Middle School age level. The ROCK teachers have done this from day one and I feel it has made such a difference with Kaleb.

I honestly am so pleased with the ROCK that I could write pages upon pages of all the great things my son has accomplished while in this program. The teachers in the ROCK deserve more credit than I can put into words. They have so much excitement and drive for my son and all the students to exceed and that excitement spills over onto the students.

This school year my son is now an 8<sup>th</sup> Grader in the ROCK and continues to grow and exceed as a student. He enjoys school and has such great relationships with the teachers and staff at West Middle/The Rock that I know will last a lifetime. My hope is that the ROCK continues and other schools can adopt this same style of learning in the future. Kaleb is a prime example of success of the ROCK program at West Middle School.

Thank you for your time.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Angela K. Rice". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the left of the printed name.

Angela Rice

502-552-3427

Shelby West Middle School  
100 Warriors Way  
Shelbyville, KY 40065

September 12, 2019

PEAK AWARD

Kentucky School Boards Association  
260 Democrat Drive  
Frankfort, KY 40601

Dear Panel:

It is truly an honor that Shelby County Public Schools has nominated West Middle School's The Rock Academy, a teacher driven and created personalized learning program, for the KSBA PEAK Award. Born out of the desire to personalize for each student, the goal of the program is to create "resilient learners who show ownership of learning through competency-based paths to deepen knowledge and understanding" through teaching the whole child, meeting the academic and social-emotional needs of students on all levels, and through growing students in the competencies of Shelby County's Profile of a Graduate. In its third year of existence, the success of The Rock Academy is demonstrated through state and local assessment measures, student exhibitions and defenses of learning, as well as through school board and community partnerships. As the structures and beliefs of this program spread throughout West Middle and across the Shelby County school district, the driving force of The Rock Academy continues to be building a culture of learners, leaders, and innovators.

One of the greatest keys to the success of the program has been the dedication to creating an environment where each student can be his or her true self, expressing their own beliefs and respecting the opinions of others. Students in The Rock Academy have shown to be exemplars in this area, and this has been achieved through the relationship building made possible by advisory. Through an established advisor/advisee structure, students build relationships with their chosen advisors as well as their fellow classmates across grade levels. Students choose advisors based on personality traits as well as attributes that they feel will help them meet their goals, both academic and personal. They share openly and candidly about their celebrations and struggles, meet weekly for intimate advisor meetings, and work toward self-improvement throughout the school year, or, for most Rock students, throughout their middle school careers, learning with the same teachers and advisor of their choice. The family-feel in The Rock Academy allows students a comfort level to learn freely and without inhibitions, feeling safe to fail forward, change their thinking, and celebrate synthesis of learning.

Establishing and maintaining a positive culture is a staple in The Rock Academy, but so is preparing our students to become productive members of tomorrow's workforce through public exhibitions and community involvement. All students participate in numerous exhibitions throughout the year, with an emphasis on the competencies of Shelby County's Profile of a Graduate. Becoming effective

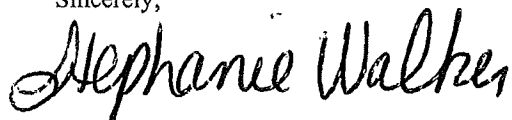
communicators, global citizens, responsible collaborators, critical thinkers, inspired innovators, and lifelong learners are all focuses as learning and exhibitions unfold. While all students work toward proficiency in becoming effective communicators, each student chooses additional competencies to prioritize and refine for each exhibition, creating and monitoring personal goals throughout the process. With the help of board members, local business owners and experts, college professors, and other community members, students observe mentors for the competencies, receive guidance and real-time feedback, and even receive evaluations from those in the very fields they are exploring with the authentic work they produce. At the conclusion of each year, students reflect on their growth in the Profile of a Graduate competencies with a culminating Defense of Learning, where students present and defend evidence of growth in their chosen competencies. A panel of community members, teachers, administrators, board members, and family members evaluate, question, and give feedback to the students, ensuring they are growing, thriving, and are prepared for the next grade level.

In The Rock Academy, we emphasize competency and performance-based assessments to prepare students for life beyond our classrooms. This has allowed students to thrive in real-world skill development, but our students also show consistent growth in local and state standardized testing. While immense growth is reported in students' first year in the program, students grow even more in their second, proving the success of our looping philosophy and of the complete immersion into the program. In addition to standardized and performance-based assessment data, we also focus on the personal growth that we observe in our students. With the emphasis of developing global citizens through a positive learning climate, community partnerships, as well as ongoing group and individual service projects, we believe that our students embody Shelby County Public School's mission statement and that we truly are "preparing wise students who master standards, lead by example, and embrace social responsibility."

As the world continues to change and as the demands of the workforce evolve at such a rapid rate, we believe that the way students are educated must continue to change as well so that they will be prepared to adapt and thrive, ready to face whatever challenges are to come. We are proud to see our efforts for change spread throughout West Middle School, our Shelby County School District, and beyond. Through establishing official personalized learning visits for fellow educators, the structures and beliefs of The Rock Academy are reaching teachers, administrators and superintendents from other districts across the state. We have been honored to share our journey with others and to help inspire change for children across the Commonwealth. It has been with the help of board members, fellow colleagues, students' families, and community members that our vision for change has been and continues to be realized.

We thank you for this opportunity to be considered for such a prestigious award.

Sincerely,



Stephanie Walker  
West Middle School Teacher



Kate Robinson  
West Middle School Teacher