

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Willoughby-Eastlake School of Innovation?

The Willoughby-Eastlake School of Innovation (SOI) will be the first platform school in Ohio that infuses STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) curriculum and instructional practices with a focus on rigorous Design Focused Learning™ beginning in grade three. Design Focused Learning™ means that students and teachers are co-designers of the work. The students are engaged in solving problems and developing skills through process-based learning opportunities. Teaching and learning are still centered around grade level standards while students work collaboratively across grade levels and disciplines. To date, this educational option has been limited to grades 6-12, but our community has taken the lead in bringing this to younger children, thereby creating a model to be used by the whole state and even the country.

As a model STEM school, the School of Innovation will:

- Serve as a platform school, a prototype, for other educators and students to visit in order to learn how to incorporate similar learning situations in other classrooms locally, statewide and nationally
- Activate a community of STEM learners (students teachers, parents, partners, community members) who are critical and creative thinkers;
- Enable all to collaborate to design innovative solutions to real-world challenges within the context of projects, community service opportunities and the overall culture of the school;
- Work hard to ensure that students graduating from SOI are socially responsible leaders in their communities;
- Ensure that the W-E district and community benefit from what is learned and incubated in SOI;
- Connect with partners and workforce demands to ensure college and career readiness.

Where will the school be located?

The School of Innovation is located at 32500 Chardon Road in Willoughby Hills. The district purchased the former Eaton University building in the spring of 2014 to house this unique program. The contemporary design and infrastructure supports advanced technologies. Renovations will be completed by August 2015.

When will it open?

The School of Innovation will welcome its inaugural class of students in grades 3, 4 and 5 in August 2015. A new grade will be added to the school each year, ultimately becoming a school with grades 3-12. Enrollment for each grade will be approximately 75 students, with three classes of about 25 students each. Total enrollment will be approximately 750.

Who is paying for this school?

Are my taxes going to go up because of this?

Taxes will not increase because of this school. The Willoughby-Eastlake City School District was awarded a Straight A Fund Grant for the School of Innovation. The funds from the grant award are being used for professional development, equipment, materials, technology and developing the design approach for learning. With the closing of an existing building requiring extensive repairs and renovation, the district will actually experience a reduction in spending.

Who can go to this school? Can my child attend? What is the process for admission?

Part of the design process includes the development of admission criteria after reviewing entrance requirements being used by similar schools. We anticipate the admission criteria to be developed by early 2015 with the application process open in late winter of 2015. Class rosters should be determined by March 2015. Actual dates when determined will be shared with the community.

I like my locally assigned school. Do I have to send my child here?

Families are encouraged to consider the School of Innovation if it would be an appropriate learning environment for their student. All students have the option to remain at their home school. Admission to the School of Innovation is completely voluntary for all students who meet the admission requirements, including those families with students in the Gifted and Talented program. No student will be required to attend the School of Innovation. Transportation will continue to be provided.

Why is this STEM-focused? What does STEM even mean? Why does STEM matter?

STEM stands for science, technology, engineering and math and STEM schools work to embed these disciplines into the entire curriculum. STEM schools engage everyone in transdisciplinary teaching and learning rooted in problem-solving. This encourages children to learn complex concepts in a context that they find relevant and therefore more engaging. The STEM classroom fosters hands-on learning and collaboration, which presents learning in a real-world setting more like a contemporary work environment.

"Over the past 10 years, jobs in STEM fields have grown three times as fast as jobs in non-STEM fields, according to the Department of Commerce, and STEM fields are expected to grow by 17 percent between 2008 and 2018, compared to just 9.8 percent growth for non-STEM fields in the same time frame. But without an influx of graduates in these areas, the U.S. will not have enough workers to fill those jobs. STEM schools can help young people gain the skills necessary to succeed in these fields. Over the next decade alone, the U.S. must produce approximately 1 million more STEM-degree graduates than currently projected to meet the demands of the economy, according to a 2012 report by the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology." Source: GreatSchools.org

Who are the teachers and administrators at the School of Innovation?

Are you taking teachers out of my local school?

The school leadership and teaching staff were selected through an open interview process and include current Willoughby-Eastlake staff who will be reassigned from other schools in the district. The teachers have a variety of experiences at different grade levels and in all content areas. Specialists in gifted education and special education are also part of the staff, in addition to art, music and physical education teachers.

