

## Landon: Westport schools focused on future

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As the Westport school district implements several new academic programs this year, Superintendent of Schools Elliott Landon outlined his long-term education agenda Tuesday to the Westport Rotary Club.

"By every objective measure, we do excellent work," Landon told the gathering in the Inn at Longshore. "Our educational programs are exceedingly strong, and our students perform admirably after they graduate."

Landon's remarks focused on "Westport Education 2025: Meeting the Global Challenge," a long-range curriculum initiative launched last year that seeks to develop local students' critical thinking, collaborative and problem-solving skills. Westport educators collaborated with professors from Columbia University's Teachers College in creating the 2025 plan.

"Work, learning and citizenship in the 21st century demand that we all know how to reason, analyze, weigh evidence, problem solve and communicate effectively," Landon said. "These are essential survival skills for all of our children if they are not to be at an alarming disadvantage with others in other countries in today's highly-competitive global knowledge economy."

Working towards the Westport Education 2025 goals, the school district introduced this year a new math program, Singapore Math, for students in kindergarten and grades 1 and 2, modeled on the math curriculum in Singapore's schools. The program, Landon said, is designed to prepare students to "successfully solve countless mathematical problems with which they are unfamiliar, much as they will have to do as adults in the global workplace."

The school district has also introduced a new social studies course, "Global Themes," for freshmen at Staples High School and plans during the next three years to "completely restructure" the social studies curriculum at the town's two middle schools, Landon reported.

"We anticipate that in teaching our students to think conceptually like a social scientist, their problem-solving skills will be enhanced," he added.

Landon has served as Westport schools' superintendent since 1999. He previously worked in the same position in Ridgefield, Garden City, N.Y., and Long Beach, N.Y.

In June, his contract was extended for another two years, with a salary increase of 2 percent, from from about \$282,000 to approximately \$288,000.

After his remarks, Landon spoke with the Westport News about the recently released results of the 2011 Government Prevention Initiative for Youth survey, which polled students on alcohol, drug and cigarette use and other social issues such as bullying.

"We're still concerned about cigarettes, we're still concerned about alcohol," he said. "We continue to work to educate kids about not using those substances. But we've seen a substantial drop in the number of kids who are engaging in those substances since 2001."

Landon also addressed another section of the survey, in which approximately 50 percent of 10th and 11th graders reported that they had cheated on a test during the last year.

"It's a universal problem," he said. "If you look at any area -- whether it's sports, entertainment or business -- they're cheating like crazy. It's hard to find role models for these kids anymore."

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