

Leyden Through the Years

Educate • Enrich • Empower : Students & Communities



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For nearly a century, the story of Leyden High Schools has been one of constant expansion and progress. Its history is a long and proud one. At the turn of the century, Leyden Township had no high school. Those few students who pursued an education beyond grade school went to nearby high schools, such as Proviso.

In 1913, a two-year high school was started in a portable building on the present Hester Grade School grounds, and by 1918 there were twenty students enrolled in the high school. During the 1920s, the bulk of the population in the area lived east of the Des Plaines River, and the area where East Leyden now stands was open land. After a

third referendum, the voters approved a four-year high school. In April 1924, the Leyden Community High School was organized as Cook County District 212. The 16-room building was completed at a cost of \$125,000 and was first occupied in February of 1927.

In 1930, the population of the entire school District was 4,000 with 246 students and 13 teachers in the high school. By 1940, the population had grown to 10,000 citizens with 27 teachers serving 600 students. By 1950, during the period following World War II, the District grew rapidly to 45,000 citizens with a proportionate increase in enrollment to 1,100 students served by 65 teachers.

To keep up with the rapid growth of the community, East Leyden increased its facilities with additions in 1933, 1940, 1945, and 1947. Over 60% of East Leyden's building was constructed by 1954-1955. Construction of the West Leyden facility took place between 1957 and 1959, taking a student overload away from the East Campus and opening its doors to both freshmen and sophomore students on September 8, 1959. The sophomores, who attended East Leyden their first year, graduated in 1962. The freshmen, the first group to attend West for all four years, graduated in 1963. The cost of the completed West Leyden building was \$7.1 million. It contained approximately 350,000 square feet of floor space and occupied 34 acres of land. By this time, the population of the District was 65,000 citizens with 178 teachers serving 3,300 students.

From 1965 to 1969, West Leyden was the home of Triton Junior College, serving 10,000 students. When Triton left West Leyden for its newly built facilities in River Grove, it left West Leyden richer with the addition of 16 classrooms. In 1972, a three-story addition was constructed in the center court of East Campus housing the media center, social studies department and support for English Learners (EL).

In 1974-1975, Leyden Community High School celebrated "Fifty Years of Excellence." The Board of Education commemorated this milestone with an Open House held on Sunday, October 13, 1974. At the end of its first half-century of existence, the Leyden schools had reached their apex with a District population of 75,000 citizens, while serving 4,696 students. At this same time, the last addition to the north end of the East Campus building was completed including a new field house, auto shop, and machine shop. Having last won an athletic state championship in the 1959-1960 school year (East Leyden wrestling), the 1977-1978 school year brought two more great athletic

accomplishments to East Leyden: another state championship wrestling team and a state championship football team.

Since the early 1970s, both Leyden campuses began experiencing a decrease in enrollment, a trend caused mainly by smaller families. Thus, in the fall of 1981, the athletic programs and fine arts programs of both schools were combined into single programs. West Leyden's school colors - blue and gold - and East Leyden's mascot - an eagle - were adopted for the new combined program. The merger has proven to be successful both in performance and in combining the spirit and youth of all communities in the District.



Both Leyden High Schools enjoy the highest accreditation given by the AdvancED and the Educational Service Region of Cook County. During the 1983-1984 school year, East Leyden was recognized as one of the state's finest high schools.

During the 1984-1985 school year, the United States Department of Education and the President of the United States recognized both East and West as Blue Ribbon Schools. Principals of both East and West Leyden were presented with a recognition flag and a plaque in a ceremony held in the Rose Garden at the White House in Washington D.C.

In 1988, the Alumni Wall of Fame was established to honor select alumni who have earned recognition for their achievements and contributions in their fields of endeavor. The alumni are also honored at an afternoon ceremony and reception. The highlight of their two-day visit to Leyden, however, is talking with students about their own ability to achieve goals by applying their talents and working hard.

After a study determined that instruction at West was interrupted for 20 seconds out of every two minutes due to jet traffic to and from O'Hare International Airport, a massive soundproofing project was undertaken at the West Campus between 1991 and 1992. Through a grant provided by the Federal Aviation Administration and the City of Chicago, the classrooms and instructional areas at West Leyden were soundproofed at a cost of over \$6.5 million.

Leyden in the 21st Century

The Leyden High Schools today are steeped in excellence, tradition, diversity, and opportunity. With approximately 3,500 students, 270 teachers (88% of whom hold master's or higher degrees), and an appraised value of buildings and equipment of \$93 million, the Leyden High Schools offer something for every student. Leyden offers a wide range of gifted education programs, honors and advanced placement courses, and comprehensive vocational and career education programs in its more than 200 courses.



Leyden students continue to compete with the very best. They have the opportunity to participate in 23 interscholastic sports and over 90 clubs and activities.

On April 1, 2003, the citizens of our communities demonstrated their belief in Leyden High School District 212 when they passed a referendum, increasing the Education Fund tax rate (which had remained the same for 40 years) from \$.92 to \$1.42 per \$100 of assessed valuation. Without the successful passage of the referendum, drastic cuts in programs, services, and opportunities for students loomed. A massive campaign by parents, community leaders, staff

members, and students created support for the referendum, and it passed on its first attempt. The increased revenues from the tax-rate increase enabled Leyden to continue to provide a top-quality, comprehensive education for its students.

In January 2009, the District purchased 12 acres of property from the Thompson Steel Company. This property, located across the street from East Leyden, was used for additional parking and athletic fields initially, and helped the District meet its needs for the future. In the spring of 2015, “The Annex” was dedicated as a new addition to our athletic fields.



Also in May 2010, of 880 school districts in Illinois, Leyden High School District 212 became only the second to achieve District Accreditation status. Because of our commitment to continuous improvement, Leyden chose to pursue District Accreditation through NCA-AdvancED, the largest school accreditation organization in the country. In 2015, Leyden was once again awarded District Accreditation, with the team citing the school as promoting “genuine care and concern for students, creating a pervasive culture of trust and personal bonds between staff and students.”

For over a decade, Leyden has been moving steadily toward the day when each student would be issued a digital device as an instructional tool to foster an environment of critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity. That day arrived during the 2012-2013 school year when virtually all students were issued a Google Chromebook computer.

In February 2014, the College Board recognized Leyden High School District 212 as the National Advanced Placement School of the Year, offering more students the opportunity to take AP classes while increasing the percentage of students earning scores of 3 or higher on AP exams, thereby “identifying motivated, academically-prepared students who are likely to benefit from rigorous AP course work.”

Through the Sprint ConnectEd grant students who do not have internet access at home are provided district hotspots. In 2015, Leyden was selected as one of three schools in the state of Illinois to pilot E-Learning days. When school is canceled due to inclement weather or an unforeseen event, students are given instruction online. We believe this device, together with our Chromebooks, sparks a transformation in teaching and learning and provides students with equal access to information, learning, resources, and the digital tools they need to be well-prepared for the world in which they live.

During the summer months of 2016, a discussion began regarding the vision and mission for Leyden after meeting with parents, students, and community members an updated mission and vision statement were created. “Educate, Enrich, and Empower: Students and Communities” became the new mission for Leyden. In keeping with the tradition of the Board of Education’s motto, the district vision became, “Doing what’s best for the kids.”

Along with these conversations came the idea of creating a schedule that would allow for more student support and collaborative learning throughout the school day, however in order to accomplish this, both East and West Campuses would need building renovations. On May 18, 2017, West Leyden broke ground on its \$35 million construction project. The following year March 15, 2018, East Leyden broke ground on its \$55 million project. These construction projects brought additional classrooms, student commons spaces, renovated cafeterias, natatorium



at the East Campus, and more.

After a successful three years, the E-Learning pilot ended in 2018. In 2019, due to the success of the pilot, a new law was created to allow schools to use E-Learning days in lieu of canceling school.

By constantly reviewing and upgrading our curriculum, our programs, our resources, and our supports and by working in the partnership with students, parents, and the Leyden community, we are will continue to create a positive learning environment that fulfills both the Board of Education's vision of "Doing What's Best for the Kids" and the District's mission statement, "Educate, Enrich, Empower: Students and Communities."