

Here's what I think ...

By Ty Ankrom

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I love when schools try something different. We learn from what others have done, what's worked and what's failed.

When it's a Pickaway County school, that pride is magnified.

A few years ago, Westfall administrators sought to create an innovative program that would provide students with some hands-on learning opportunities.

Billy Dennis, principal at Westfall High School, proposed creating a student-run print shop. Last summer, some rooms in the high school were reconfigured to create a home for the Westfall Business Academy – known colloquially as WBA – which started in the fall.

In its first year, 10 juniors and seniors are learning how to run a business, from taking orders to making the products, delivering them and working with customers. WBA is providing students with a tremendous opportunity to gain experiences that will prove beneficial in their adult years.

Before that though, the experience is playing a big role in decisions students are making about college and careers.

For example, senior Ashley Salmons, who is the company's co-manager and oversees all aspects of the print shop, said her role at WBA has cemented her interest in pursuing a business degree in college.

The experience has also helped her in her current job at a Grove City movie theater, giving her confidence in troubleshooting and making her better at working with people, she said.

During a visit, I witnessed competent, motivated students who are producing high-quality products.

Chris Norris, who runs the program with Pat Kranz, gives no lectures, has no notes or tests for the students. The classroom operates as a business, with students getting to work on orders as soon as they arrive.

They can't waste a minute, as they are running a business in only 50 minutes a day, five days a week.

Mr. Dennis said the program has become a source of pride for the Westfall community and he's eager to see it grow.

Westfall is learning from this initial year what worked and is setting the stage for bigger and better things for the future.

Ty Ankrom is the superintendent of the Pickaway County Educational Service Center.

