



DISTRICT 57 REPORT

A MESSAGE FROM YOUR SUPERINTENDENT



Greetings, District 57 families! It has been quite an eventful first few months of school, and I'm pleased to bring you this newsletter to report on some of the important things going on in the District and our schools.

As you know, the School Board is considering placing a limiting tax rate referendum on the ballot in the March 2018 election, to address our highest priority operating and facility maintenance needs. This fall, we sent out a public opinion survey to get feedback about funding proposals that are under consideration: both a tax referendum and cuts to staffing and programs.

We also held Community Forums, and we assembled a Community Task Force that met three times. After learning about the District's financial situation and considering survey results, the Task Force voted to recommend that the Board pursue a tax referendum to avoid making significant cuts starting next school year. At its Dec. 21 meeting (7 p.m., Fairview), the Board will vote on whether to place a referendum on the ballot and on what the ballot language should be. Please see the story on Page 2 for more details about the proposal being considered and staffing and program cuts that will be necessary without a referendum.

I thank the community members who participated in the survey and attended Forums – your input has been an important part of this decision-making process. I also thank the Task Force members for becoming educated about the situation and putting so much thought into your recommendation. Thanks also to our Board members for their key role in making this very important decision. And finally, I thank District 57 staff members, who work tirelessly to “do more with less,” and administrators, who have done their best to develop funding solutions that meet the needs of students and taxpayers.

As we head into the holidays, I want to recognize our students, families and staff for the many ways they have made a difference for others – not only this season but since school started. From food drives to clothing collections to hurricane relief and much more, all four schools have planned service projects that are valuable learning opportunities for students. Check out #D57givesback on Facebook and Twitter to see the examples.

Students are benefiting from many other new and innovative learning opportunities this school year – read on to learn more. Thank you for taking time to be informed and for your ongoing support of the schools. Happy holidays to the District 57 community!

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HUGE RESPONSE TO HURRICANE RELIEF DRIVES

Westbrook held a weeklong hurricane relief drive for Puerto Rico in October, collecting nearly 30,000 diapers, bandages and containers of baby formula. On Oct. 25, students and staff, along with Dr. Elaine Aumiller (left), loaded the items onto a truck donated by Novak and Parker. The donations were taken to a Chicago church and then flown to the hurricane-ravaged island on a plane donated by FedEx. Westbrook's Puerto Rico drive was covered by [WBBM Radio](#), NBC5, ABC7, the [Daily Herald](#) and the [Mount Prospect Journal](#). Fairview, Lions Park and Lincoln also planned hurricane relief drives, raising money for Florida, Texas and Puerto Rico. (Photo by Caleb Enfield, District 57.)

SCHOOL BOARD MIGHT ASK VOTERS TO APPROVE TAX REFERENDUM, TO FUND OPERATING AND FACILITY NEEDS AND AVOID MAJOR CUTS

The District 57 School Board will vote Dec. 21 on whether to place a limiting tax rate referendum on the ballot in March 2018. A successful referendum would help the District deal with serious financial challenges, caused by growing enrollment, rising operating costs, a low commercial tax base, state and federal cuts, and unfunded mandates. The additional funds would be used for highest-priority operating and facility maintenance needs.

POTENTIAL PROGRAM AND STAFFING REDUCTIONS

If a referendum does not pass, the District will deal with the shortfall by making program and staffing cuts to reduce the deficit by 50 percent each of the next two school years. The cuts for next year would total \$850,000, eliminating approximately nine full-time positions and resulting in larger class sizes. The cuts also would reduce the construction and maintenance budget and the ability to address critical safety and security upgrades and other deferred maintenance needs. The second-year cuts would take away another 18 positions and eliminate art and music at all four schools, as well as the band and orchestra programs. Westbrook, Fairview and Lions Park school days would be shortened, to add teacher planning time (teachers currently plan while students are at art and music). Student fees would increase, and intramural sports and clubs would be parent funded.

If a referendum does not pass in March, the Board could try again next November; if this second attempt is successful, the next round of cuts would not be made. (See complete list of cuts at this [link](#)).

"These are extremely difficult decisions. No one in Administration or the schools wants to see drastic cuts that will adversely affect our students. But we must make financial preparations for all possibilities," says Elaine Aumiller, Ed.D., superintendent of schools." She adds that the financial challenges have forced the District to draw down its fund

balance, which is not sustainable because a school district cannot operate without emergency reserves.

REFERENDUM PROPOSAL

To avoid major reductions, Administration, the School Board and a Community Task Force worked throughout the fall to develop a viable funding solution. The Task Force recommended that the Board place a referendum on the ballot. The Board agreed and has been considering ballot language that entails an 85-cent increase (over the last known limiting tax rate paid), which could equate to \$238 per year per \$100,000 of home value. This is the example that would be presented on the ballot, but the estimated increase could be lower for individual homeowners, for two reasons. First, the example must be based on last year's Equalized Assessed Value (EAV) and Cook County Multiplier (according to election rules); these numbers fluctuate, and, in fact, the multiplier was unusually high this year. Second, the estimate on the ballot cannot include exemptions, but most homeowners have at least one exemption, which would also lower the tax. For example, a taxpayer with a homeowner's exemption could see an increase of \$153.27 per \$100,000 of home value; a taxpayer with homeowner's and senior exemptions could see an increase of \$85.27.

In recommending that the Board pursue a referendum, the Task Force considered results from the public opinion survey. Fifty-five percent said they would definitely or probably support a referendum of 90 cents. (See survey results at this [link](#)).

If a referendum is placed on the ballot, a grass-roots campaign committee will be formed. The District cannot campaign for or against a ballot proposal.

Background on the District's financial situation and funding proposals can be found at this [link](#).



MAKING MUSIC AND MEMORIES IN A NEW, INVITING SPACE

A mobile unit was installed at Westbrook over the summer, to house the staff workroom/lounge and music classroom. Westbrook was at capacity last year, and this year's enrollment required two more sections. The mobile is a cost-effective way to meet the needs of the growing District 57 community for the time being. The new music room has received rave reviews and is "a warm and inviting space where students have room to dance, play instruments and sing," according to music teacher Rebecca Connelly. "It's an exciting adventure for them to come out of the main building and into our music mobile, where they create, explore, perform and experience the joy of making music together." (Photo by Rebecca Connelly, District 57.)

WHAT DOES STATE'S NEW EDUCATION FUNDING PLAN MEAN FOR D57?

In late August, the Illinois Legislature passed a bill that changes the way the state disperses money to school districts. The new education funding plan is intended to increase money for schools that have lagged behind. Many community members have asked how the changes will affect District 57. Adam Parisi, the District's assistant superintendent for finance and operations, has the answers:

1. Will District 57 receive more money?

Preliminary estimates indicate we should yield an additional \$80,000. However, the state is in financial crisis and has billions of dollars of backlogged bills. Payments to District 57 have been behind since 2010. So there is no guarantee that we will receive the entire amount or that it will come in a timely manner.

2. Could the additional funds help the District with its funding challenges?

District 57 will not receive a lot of extra money because we have a low percentage of low-income students. The \$80,000 represents .003 percent of our revenue for fiscal year 2018. We will put it to good use, but it is not nearly enough make up for our budget shortfall.

3. What is the purpose of the new education funding formula? How did it come about?

The intention is to address disparities in school funding and even the playing field, so needy districts get as much as wealthier districts (with a guarantee that no district will lose money). The education funding plan represents a significant compromise in a state that has been known for its budget impasse and difficulties with school funding. State lawmakers have been working on improving Illinois' unfair system for years. When they finally passed a budget several months ago, there was a requirement that the funding formula be changed.

THANK YOU...

...to the District 57 Education Foundation and its supporters for a successful fall fundraiser! Thanks to your generosity, the Foundation was able to fund grants totaling \$11,800 for all four schools. Save the date for the spring event on March 3, 2018. More to come!

First graders take part in a coding activity, using iPads provided by the District 57 Education Foundation and Osmo learning materials purchased through a Robert Bosch Tool Corporation grant. (Photo by Kim Stortz, District 57.)



PREPARING STUDENTS FOR A HIGH-TECH FUTURE BY TEACHING CODING EARLY AND OFTEN

If you ask Westbrook first graders about the basics of computer coding, chances are they'll be able to tell you a thing or two. That's because instructional technology coach Kim Stortz has been delivering monthly coding lessons in each first-grade classroom. It's part of a District-wide effort to get students of all ages interested in computer science and show them how technology works, enhancing their problem-solving and critical-thinking skills along the way.

Stortz is teaching the students how to do "block coding." The first graders have learned the meaning of words like "algorithm," and they have put their knowledge to use with hands-on Maker Space activities that show how coding makes things happen.

Instructional technology coach Ashley Patla is doing similar activities with second and third graders at Fairview and Lions Park. Fourth and fifth graders learned about coding throughout last year, but now they are focusing on 3D printing and its many applications. Patla and Stortz collaborate on their coding lessons, using resources on code.org, a nonprofit site dedicated to expanding computer science education.

In addition, all four District 57 schools participated in Hour of Code activities in December. Hour of Code, part of the celebration of Computer Science Education Week, enables students to take part in a one-hour tutorial that gives an overview of coding. The global event involves students in more than 180 countries. It "demystifies code," to get more people interested in the field of computer science.

Lincoln also is doing its part to promote computer science. Coding Club, which has 15 members from seventh and eighth grade, has been meeting weekly since September and concludes in December. The after-school club has been around since 2015, but this year Capital One got involved, sending its software engineers to teach real-life coding skills and mentor students to help them master specific codes.

The goal of the club is for students to collaborate in small groups to create their own app for a Samsung tablet, such as a game or productivity tool. They learn the necessary skills by using tutorials in an MIT app on their Chromebooks. To create the app, they connect to Samsung tablets, which have been provided by Capital One. Capital One will sponsor a Dec. 13 event where the Lincoln students and students from other school districts will present the apps they created and have the opportunity to win awards.

Club sponsors and Lincoln teachers Amy Marker and Alexa Martin say the club has been a great opportunity for students to learn from actual software engineers who are applying these skills in the business world every day. "Our world is dominated by ever-changing software and technology. We need to provide opportunities for students to begin to learn about computer science so they can develop their skills and be aware of the career opportunities," Marker says. "But even if they don't pursue a career in computer science, learning to code helps them develop logical thinking, problem-solving skills and mathematics skills, and think creatively about their world and find solutions."

LIONS PARK KICKS OFF SCHOOL YEAR WITH NEW PRINCIPAL



Katie Kelly became principal of Lions Park in August, replacing Kris Gritzmacher, who retired at the end of last school year. Kelly most recently was principal of Field Elementary School in Park Ridge. She also has been an assistant principal and has taught second, fourth and fifth grades. In this

interview, she reflects on her first few months at Lions Park:

1. How do you like working at Lions Park? What is the best part of your new job? What challenges have you encountered?

Working at Lions Park has been wonderful. The students are enthusiastic and respectful. The parents have been supportive and eager to get involved in their children's education. The staff is unbelievably collaborative and dedicated. The best part so far has been that, due to the school being smaller than my previous school, I am able to get into the classrooms, lunchroom and playground more frequently. This has enabled me to get to know the students and learn how to best support the teachers. The biggest challenge has been trying to learn the names of all the students. While I know many already, I have more to learn.

2. Why did you choose to work at the elementary school level? What do you like best about this age group?

Elementary school is an exciting place because students are still enthusiastic about school and their teachers. There is a lot of important learning that happens, but there is also a lot of fun. For example, in October we had Kindness Week. Students dressed up each day and did fun activities to promote the message of the week.

3. Do you ever miss being a teacher? How did teaching help prepare you to become a principal?

I loved being a teacher, and I certainly miss the connections built with the students I taught. I also enjoyed thinking of new and creative ways to teach concepts. However, I now appreciate that I can impact the learning of even more children and that I see how students grow and change over their years in elementary school. Being a teacher helped prepare me to become a principal by providing a true view of the many things that go into teaching. In addition to focusing on instruction, teachers nurture the creation of a community of learners while helping individual students. I am a better principal because I understand the teacher's role.

4. What do you think are the best ways for parents to help their children be happy and successful in school?

Parents can help by modeling a love of learning and reading in their own lives, and by partnering with school staff. This can be accomplished by paying attention to communication from school, sharing information about children with teachers and reinforcing the messages and concepts students learn in school.

TWO BIG CHANGES ROLLED OUT AT LINCOLN: ADDITIONAL MATH INSTRUCTION AND CHROMEBOOKS FOR ALL

Lincoln implemented two major educational initiatives this fall, both of which were designed to ensure students are receiving the best possible preparation for high school and beyond.

MATH MINUTES: Students are now receiving 39 additional minutes of math instruction each day (80 minutes total), giving them more time to explore new concepts and eventually master them, so they have a solid foundation when they start high school. Student schedules were restructured to make more math time available without adding to the length of the school day. Math, language arts and social studies/science are now being taught in three core blocks of classes. Principal Paul Suminski says the transition has gone well, and he's received positive feedback from teachers about the added opportunities for collaboration. "They also appreciate that they have time to show more examples and answer more questions," he says, adding that Lincoln will analyze grades and test scores at the end of the school year, as part of the School Improvement Plan. "We'll get an idea of where our students are and make adjustments as necessary."

CHROMEBOOKS: All Lincoln students received Chromebook computers this school year, as part of the full rollout of the 1:1 Computer Ratio Program. They use the computers during the school day and bring them home each night, giving them easy access to online learning. District 57 began piloting the use of Chromebooks two years ago and expanded the program last year. This is the first year that all sixth, seventh and eighth graders have their own Chromebooks. They were purchased from the District's technology budget, using savings incurred from replacing MacBooks with Chromebooks (and some previous Chromebooks were provided by the District 57 Education Foundation). Suminski says Kate Sassatelli, technology integration coach, has been instrumental in supporting the technology and helping teachers find meaningful ways to integrate online learning into their lesson plans. "These kids have been on devices their entire lives. They're familiar with technology, so that's not the key," Suminski says. "The goal is to teach them to use these tools for educational purposes -- to stay organized, communicate with teachers and students, conduct research and study."



BUTTERFLIES TAKE FLIGHT AT FAIRVIEW

Fairview second graders and their teacher, Kari Commare, celebrated the release of their just-emerged butterflies into the school's new butterfly garden in October, as part of a hands-on science project. Former Fairview student Dan Macina created the garden for his Eagle Scout project last year, with support of the Mount Prospect Garden Club and some funding from the District 57 Education Foundation. (Photo by Chris Trezise, District 57.)