



# DISTRICT 57 REPORT

## A MESSAGE FROM YOUR SUPERINTENDENT

I am pleased to share my first District 57 newsletter since becoming your superintendent in July! It has been a busy few months. These pages recap all that has happened and preview some exciting things to come. I hope you'll take a few minutes to read them!

I am incredibly honored to serve as your superintendent. This is an exciting time of change in District 57, as we have welcomed several new administrators. We've had a smooth leadership transition, and I thank everyone who has helped along the way – our School Board members, my administrative team, staff in the schools, parents and families, and, of course, our amazing students. Please read Page 3 for more of my thoughts on my new role as superintendent, as well as Q&As with our other new administrators.

There have been many exciting district-wide events this fall, including the Community Forum where we unveiled the Lions Park addition and demonstrated our social-emotional learning curriculum, the recent webinar addressing anxiety in children, and our virtual Family Coding Night, which was presented for all D57 families in conjunction with national Computer Science Education Week. It's always inspiring to see how this community embraces opportunities to come together and learn new things. Starting in the new year, I will be hosting parent coffees to get to know you better, answer questions and hear your ideas and feedback.

I am looking forward to supporting a District equity audit in the new year, to examine how we deliver educational services and whether all students equally and equitably receive those services. We are hiring an objective outside firm, using grant money from the Illinois State Board of Education, to identify our strengths as well as where we can grow and improve. I'll update you along the way and will also let you know about upcoming opportunities for families to weigh in and get involved.

It's hard to believe how far we've come since last year at this time. There are still many challenges we face and the future is uncertain, but we're grateful that our COVID-19 mitigations are working and we've been able to sustain in-person learning. We're hoping for a much better 2022. No matter what, though, our school community is strong and will find creative solutions to address whatever comes our way.

Thank you, again, for warmly welcoming me as your new superintendent. Happy holidays to our District 57 family!

**Dr. Mary Gorr**  
Superintendent of Schools, Mount Prospect School District 57

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### ADMINISTRATION

Dr. Mary Gorr  
Superintendent

Jason Kaiz  
Assistant Superintendent  
Finance and Operations

Dr. Kristin Vonder Haar  
Assistant Superintendent  
Teaching and Learning

Sara Tyburski  
Director of Student Services

Mark Fijor  
Director of Technology

### BOARD OF EDUCATION

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On Nov. 4, Mount Prospect Mayor Paul Hoefert, Dr. Mary Gorr, principal Katie Kelly, asst. principal Elise Dean, School Board members and students cut the ribbon and unveiled Lions Park's expansion. There was also a Community Forum about social-emotional learning and a chorus performance. (Photo by Mark Fijor, D57.)

Students welcomed Dr. Mary Gorr this summer. (Photo by Jenny Kustra-Quinn, D57.)





**LINCOLN:** Some brave Lincoln teachers joined the talented members of the Dance Team for a rockin' half-time show during a home girls basketball game in November.



**WESTBROOK:** On the first day of school, staff lined up to give students and families a big welcome. (Photo by Francis Son.)



**FAIRVIEW:** Second graders enjoyed Fridays on the Lawn this fall, a time for exploring new books and taking advantage of nature's classroom. (Photo by Alice Chapman, D57.)



**LIONS PARK:** The school partnered with the Mount Prospect Fire Department in December for the 23rd annual holiday toy drive. (Photo by Dan Fotopoulos, D57.)

## THE SUCCESSFUL RETURN TO IN-PERSON LEARNING

The school year kicked off on Aug. 18 as students returned to the buildings for full-time in-person learning, with layered mitigation strategies in place to reduce the spread of COVID-19. This includes masking, social distancing as much as possible and enhanced disinfection in the schools. The District also launched an optional weekly COVID screening program to identify people who are pre-symptomatic and asymptomatic, using the University of Illinois' quick and highly accurate SHIELD PCR test. Nearly 70 percent of students opted into the program, and they have been getting tested weekly since early October.

"As expected, we have consistently had COVID cases at each of the schools, which has required quarantining among students and staff. This is always a concern, but we feel that overall the mitigations are working and keeping the numbers down," says Mary Gorr, Ed.D., superintendent. "We've been able to sustain in-person learning for the majority of students and achieve a sense of normalcy that we haven't had since spring 2020."

Gorr says this is due to a successful collaborative effort, with students, families and staff being vigilant about things like masking and staying home if there are symptoms. In addition, the District partnered with Jewel-Osco to hold a vaccination clinic at Westbrook on Nov. 22 and Dec. 13, and about 150 students received their COVID vaccine. Gorr adds that it is believed this will also help prevent serious illness and keep more students in school.

"It's important for children to experience the daily rhythm of a normal school day, which leads to better academic and social-emotional outcomes," she says, adding that staff and students have worked hard the first few months of school and have already made much progress. "We're also glad we've been able to bring back extracurricular activities and school events. Students are embracing the chance to get involved and connect with each other outside of the school day."

With new COVID variants and potential surges in the coming months, it's impossible to predict how or if schools will be affected. But Gorr says she is confident the administrative team and staff will work together, as they have in the past, to maintain healthy learning environments while simultaneously teaching and engaging students. "We also know our students, families and the community are resilient and adaptable and will do whatever it takes so everyone is safe and can meet their full potential."

# A NEW CHAPTER

## 2021 BRINGS BIG CHANGES AS LEADERS TRANSITION INTO KEY ROLES

### Q&A WITH NEW SUPERINTENDENT, DR. GORR

After a decade of serving District 57 as principal of Westbrook and assistant superintendent of teaching and learning, Mary Gorr, Ed.D., stepped into the superintendent role on July 1. She replaced Elaine Aumiller, Ed.D., who retired after 12 years of service. Gorr is certified as a Chief School Business Official. She got her start as a classroom teacher in Glenview District 34. Gorr was selected as the District's next superintendent last spring, after a national search attracted many qualified applicants, according to School Board president Eileen Kowalczyk. "Mary stood out for her educational expertise and her leadership abilities, as well as the respect she has built with District 57 stakeholders. She was the logical choice, and we're very pleased that she has gotten off to a great start, even in challenging times."

### How do you feel about your first six months as superintendent?

I said it when I was hired, and I feel the same today – this is my dream. I'm grateful for the opportunity to be a superintendent and honored to do it in a district that is important to me, where I have many relationships. One of my favorite parts of the job is working with my administrative team and the staff to continuously improve and make sure we are delivering the highest quality and best possible outcome for students. This is a challenging time, of course, but we have comprehensive systems in place – we're meeting students where they are and helping them achieve their full potential. We've already seen so much progress this year. The confidence I have in our school teams has helped my transition. They have gone above and beyond to apply our safety guidance while simultaneously making sure students are learning and engaged. I want to give a special shoutout to our nurses, who care for students AND enforce quarantines and other mitigations. The nurses – as well as the custodians – deserve much appreciation for accepting their expanded responsibilities and working hard to do their part.

### How did your past jobs prepare you to be a superintendent?

Serving as principal of Westbrook was one of the great joys of my life. I was constantly learning new things about being an effective leader and educator – from staff, students, families and my fellow administrators. When I became an assistant superintendent, I was able to take a broader look at the entire district and influence



Dr. Mary Gorr and some Fairview friends.

curriculum, staff development and even our pandemic response. Being a classroom teacher also gave me a solid foundation that I constantly draw upon; I'll never forget to keep students and their needs front and center. In addition, because I came from within the District, I'm aware of our challenges and strengths, which has helped me hit the ground running.

### You have been visiting classrooms and attending events. What do you like about seeing students and what do you learn?

When I experience our students' enthusiasm and resilience firsthand, it's contagious and inspires me to do better! They are joyful to be reunited with their teachers and peers, learning and growing together. Also, I love running into my former Westbrook students and seeing how far they've come. I try hard to remember each name, but they change so much – sometimes I need a little help!

### We hear a lot about the mental health issues that young people are facing. What are the District and schools doing to ensure children are getting the support they need?

Our schools place a strong emphasis on social-emotional learning (SEL), which means helping students build behaviors and interpersonal skills like forming positive relationships and managing emotions and stress. This supports their mental health when they are struggling due to the pandemic and other stressors. We also have strong systems in place at each school, and I'm proud of the compassionate professionals who are there for students when they need extra help. In addition, we partner closely with families because they play such an important role. Our PEPS (Partnering with Educators and Parents to Support student needs) group held an open session in October to share mental health resources. In December, we had a great turnout for our webinar addressing anxiety in children. I'll be hosting parent coffees in the new year and will ask families what other mental health topics they would like us to address and whether more supports are needed.



Danielle Crandall became the principal of Westbrook at the start of the school year. She previously served as assistant principal of Lions Park for four years. Find her Q&A at this [LINK](#).



Kristin Vonder Haar, Ed.D., who was principal of Westbrook for two years and assistant principal of the school before that, is now assistant superintendent of teaching and learning. Find her Q&A at this [LINK](#). (Photos by Francis Son.)

# FINANCIAL UPDATE

## DISTRICT ADDRESSES EFFECTS OF PANDEMIC, WHILE CONTINUING TO INVEST IN THE FUTURE

Like many individuals, businesses and school districts, District 57 has experienced the financial ramifications of COVID-19. The finance department has worked hard to position the District to weather the storm while continuing to address staffing, programs and facilities to meet future needs. Here are some highlights:

**BUDGET:** The FY22 budget that was adopted in September includes a deficit of \$246,246, partly due to the need to add instructional assistants to support remote students. Jason Kaiz, assistant superintendent of finance and operations, says the District has since reduced the deficit by cutting the cost of capital projects and finding other savings options. For example, implementing the Seamless Summer free lunch program, which is federally funded, resulted in savings in food services. Kaiz adds that District 57 has long been fiscally responsible. "Our spending is low, and our reserves have been strong, which will help us move toward a better financial picture," he says.

**CAPITAL PROJECTS:** About \$2 million has been earmarked for summer 2022 building projects. The original budgeted amount was \$3 million, but the District worked with its architects to pull out non-essential items and reduce costs. The projects, which come from the Master Facilities Plan, a prioritized list of urgent maintenance, are out for bid and will be voted on by the School Board in January. The projects include smaller-scale but necessary work, such as: a new Fairview chiller; Fairview, Lions Park and Westbrook classroom flooring and hallway carpeting; Fairview and Lions Park bathroom hand dryers; and Lincoln exterior doors. Last summer's construction was completed on time and under budget. The District added four classrooms and expanded the multi-purpose room at Lions Park, to help manage growing enrollment, and completed Lincoln's floor project, replacing hallway and common area floors.

**ESSER FUNDS:** The budget also includes \$1.15 million in federal funding from the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) program, which is intended to help schools address the student impact of COVID-19. District 57 is using the funds for things like: programs and services to address learning loss, social-emotional learning curriculum, a middle school interventionist, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), furniture and space modification to support social distancing, and technology to support student learning.



## FORMER LINCOLN PRINCIPAL HAPPY TO BE BACK AT D57 AS FINANCE HEAD

Jason Kaiz, who served as principal of Lincoln Middle School from 2012 to 2016, is District 57's new assistant superintendent of finance and operations. He was previously principal of Springman Middle School in Glenview District 34. He also has been an assistant principal in Glenview and has served as assistant and interim business manager in Glencoe. He is certified as a Chief School Business Official.

### What did you like about serving as Lincoln principal, and what made you want to return to District 57?

There are so many things I enjoyed. To top the list were the relationships I built with students, staff and parents. My greatest memories include the Rocky Runs, the student lounge and the quarterly pep assemblies with the competitions and traveling trophy of triumph. It has been great to reconnect with teachers I worked with, and I have even seen some of my old students who are now District employees. I am excited to be in this new role to support all four schools and the community.

### How has the transition been from being a principal to head of finance? How did being a principal prepare you for this job?

I believe all transitions are both exciting and anxiety provoking and this one is no different. Although I have been in this role previously, this transition has pushed me to look at the District as a whole and understand the intricacies of the four buildings. Working in four districts in my career, I have seen how impactful the business office can be on student learning and look forward to bringing that perspective to District 57. We have a strong team in the business office and the District office as a whole.

As Springman principal, I worked closely with the business office. I was on the finance committee and the task force that looked into referendum options. When the referendum passed,

I worked closely with the architects to help design the remodel of the middle school.

### What are District 57's financial strengths and challenges? How will you ensure the District remains in a good financial place?

District 57 has a great history of being fiscally responsible. Even after the referendum, that continues to be a strength. Everyone is financially aware, doing their best to understand the implications their decisions have. The biggest challenge is constantly weighing what is best for student learning with being financially responsible. It is my role to understand what is happening globally in the District to support students while working to reduce finances. Having a vision and goals that look ahead multiple years helps ensure finances are being utilized appropriately.

### Can you tell us about your plans for starting a Citizen Finance Advisory Committee?

We will develop a Citizen Finance Advisory Committee that will be charged with looking at financial projections to present to School Board members to help support them as they make financial decisions. The committee will be formed this spring and will start learning the basics of school finance. Then in the fall, the committee will begin looking at projections for the next five years. I look forward to giving stakeholders the opportunity to be part of this process.

# BACK IN BUSINESS

It's been a good fall! With students returning for a more traditional school day, the District has been able to resume some activities and traditions that had been greatly missed last year – like music, sports, Halloween parades, PTO events, fundraisers, the book fairs, food and toy drives, and more. There have even been some new traditions taking shape. The District thanks the staff and volunteers who have made these enriching opportunities possible, as well as the students who have been eager to spread their wings with their classmates.



**ALL-SCHOOL COLOR RUN AND SEVENTH-GRADE PAINT PARTY:** The PTO found some new ways to get students engaged this fall, by planning Lincoln's first-ever all-school color run and seventh-grade paint party. The Oct. 23 run, held on a sunny Saturday morning, had a great turnout, with plenty of volunteers to douse the runners in colored powder from head to toe. The Dec. 3 evening paint party took place in the cafeteria, with an artist helping participants paint the Chicago Bean and skyline. (Photos by Kris Bochenek and Eileen Kowalczyk.)



**JESSE WHITE TUMBLERS/WALK FOR WESTBROOK:** The one-and-only Jesse White Tumblers paid a visit to Westbrook on Oct. 27 and amazed students with their high-flying feats. The visit was sponsored by the PTO as a reward for raising more than \$20,000 during Walk for Westbrook. (Photo by Danielle Crandall, D57.)

**BOO BASH:** The Fairview PTO brought back its popular Boo Bash on Oct. 22, turning it into an outdoor celebration with a DJ, dancing, trunk-or-treat and a food truck. (Photo by Chris Trezise, D57.)



**CROSS COUNTRY:** Lincoln Cross Country coach and Lions Park PE teacher Steve Shaffer celebrated with the team at the Oct. 16th State meet. The 2021 team was glad to be competing again and worked hard, placing 22nd (girls) and 16th (boys) in the State. The School Board recognized the runners and coaches Shaffer and Kelly Bailey at its Nov. 18 meeting. (Photo by Kelly Bailey, D57.)



**D57 WINS NATIONAL AWARDS FOR NEWSLETTER AND COMMUNICATIONS** District 57 won two 2021 National School Communication Awards from the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA), including an Award of Excellence for this newsletter, the "District 57 Report." The newsletter was honored in the Publications and Digital Media Awards, receiving the highest honor in its category. The District 57 newsletter was one of just seven winners nationally in the category and the only one from Illinois.

The District also won an NSPRA Golden Achievement Award, which recognizes exemplary work in all aspects of school public relations, communication, marketing and engagement. The award recognized communication of the superintendent search and the hiring of Dr. Mary Gorr last spring. There were just three honorees from Illinois.