



DISTRICT 57 REPORT



A MESSAGE FROM YOUR SUPERINTENDENT

As we prepare to say goodbye (and good riddance!) to 2020, I'm pleased to share our fall/winter newsletter. Even though most students have unfortunately been away from their school buildings, the District had a busy fall, and we're making many plans for the new year. Please read the following pages to learn more.

As you know, the pandemic has presented daunting challenges to our schools and to families over the past nine months. The rising metrics have forced us to delay our transition to hybrid learning, and we are currently planning for a Jan. 19 start. I thank students, families and staff for their patience and flexibility as we've navigated this crisis together. I know remote learning can be hard on everyone. But I'm always happy to hear stories of classrooms adjusting and making the best of things – in the most creative ways. I'm also grateful to my central office administrative team for working with me around the clock all summer and fall to plan remote and hybrid models. We, along with our dedicated principals and school teams, want nothing more than to bring students back and keep them safe. Our School Board also is committed to this goal and has spent many hours analyzing metrics, listening to feedback and making tough decisions. I have faith that our efforts will pay off and that we will make hybrid learning successful, until we can return to normal.

There will be a School Board election this April, with four seats on the ballot. Petitions must be filed from Dec. 14 to 21. You can learn more at this [link](#). Also, as I announced over the summer, I plan to retire in June. The story on Page 5 explains the process for finding my replacement. There will be plenty of time for goodbyes – for now, we have much work to do. I wish you and your family all the best and hope you continue to stay safe and healthy.

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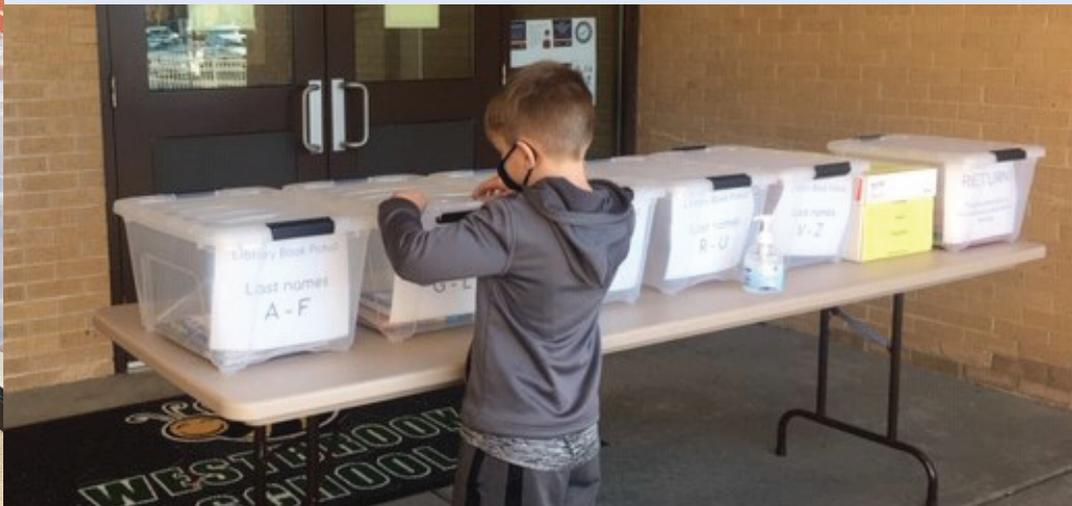
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D57 STUDENTS KEEP ON READING, THANKS TO CONTACTLESS BOOK CHECKOUT

District 57 staff have made sure students have plenty of great books to read even though they can't visit their LRCs in person right now. Students use their Destiny Discover accounts to select books and put them on hold, then they pick them up from bins at the schools. This contactless checkout has been popular, with Westbrook distributing more than 1,700 books this fall and the elementary schools averaging a combined 150 a day! (Fairview photo on left by Chris Trezise, Westbrook photo below by Darshana Shah, District 57.)



BUILDING CLASSROOM COMMUNITIES AND KEEPING STUDENTS ENGAGED DURING REMOTE LEARNING

While having class via Zoom is not ideal for the long term, many bright spots and success stories have come out of all four schools over the past few months, as staff and students have become more accustomed to remote learning. "We're proud of our students for being resilient and adaptable, and proud of our staff for the resourceful adjustments they've made," says Dr. Mary Gorr, assistant superintendent of teaching and learning. "It's not an easy transition, but staff members have worked hard to create a more interactive online learning experience that resembles the regular school day as much as possible." Here are some examples:

CROSSTOWN COLLABORATION – Enrichment teachers Jennifer Larson, Fairview, and Kristen Manteuffel, Lions Park, have been bringing their accelerated math classes together through the magic of Zoom. The students gather in large groups or breakout rooms that pair them with their peers from the other school. For example, fourth graders partnered on making surveys and analyzing data. Manteuffel says many of the kids who attend different schools know each other from activities they're not able to participate in right now, so it's exciting for them to come together via Zoom. She adds that the collaboration helps students feel less isolated in their virtual classrooms. The teachers are also joining their fourth- and fifth-grade accelerated readers, with both schools reading the same novels and posting discussions and reflections for each other to see. Larson and Manteuffel say they would like to continue their virtual partnership

even when in-person learning resumes. "There are some good things to come out of remote learning," according to Manteuffel. "We are making the most of it, and kids are engaged and excited to come to class."

SCIENCE AT HOME – Lions Park third graders are conducting hands-on science experiments in the comfort of their own kitchens. They observed seeds germinating and dissected them. They even studied real snails. The students have been able to conduct their research with help from Parent Squad volunteers who pick up materials from the school and coordinate distribution to families. The Squad also distributes paper packets that teachers put together to give students a break from screen time.

HIGH-TECH TOOLS – Teachers and students are becoming increasingly adept at incorporating technology into the virtual school day. For example, students use Padlet to display summaries of what they're reading. This allows teachers to hold them accountable without the disruption of taking up screen time on Zoom – it's the virtual equivalent of walking around the room to check student work. The District also has purchased a subscription to Pear Deck to make remote lessons more interactive and give every student a voice, even if they're shy about speaking up on Zoom. Students put responses onto a slide that teachers can see from their dashboard. Some teachers use it as a social emotional learning tool, checking in with students about how they're feeling that day.



District 57 teachers miss seeing their students in person each day. But they've put their creative energies into setting up welcoming workspaces for their virtual classrooms, whether they're teaching from school or home. Fifth-grade teacher Sara Murphy has converted her Lions Park desk and uses a large monitor (donated by a family) so she can clearly see and engage with her class. (Photo by Katie Kelly, District 57.)

Fairview principal Dan Ophus and assistant principal Una Durkan haven't let remote learning cancel their student lunches. They hold drawings for Character Card recipients and eat with the winners via Zoom. Here's Mr. Ophus with some lucky second and third graders.



WHAT'S NEXT? LOOKING AHEAD TO 2021

Due to rising COVID-19 rates in the community, the School Board decided Nov. 19 to extend remote learning until after Winter Break. District Administration is tracking COVID metrics, with the goal of launching the hybrid model Jan. 19. The District continues to provide targeted in-person services for a limited number of students with the highest levels of needs.

When hybrid begins, each school will have two cohorts. Cohorts of elementary students will attend in person half a day and do remote learning the other half. The plan is for Lincoln students to have a combination of in-person and livestream learning from home four days a week, with remote learning one day. Some students have selected to continue full remote learning. The District is sharing internal and external metrics weekly – see the [dashboard](#) on the [COVID-19 page](#) – and refining planning and safety procedures to bring students back as soon as possible. In addition, a task force of District and parent representatives is providing input about the return to school. Potential members were surveyed before selection, to ensure a broad representation of viewpoints.

NEW DIRECTOR REFLECTS ON D57 MEETING UNPRECEDENTED TECH CHALLENGE



Technology director Mark Fijor joined District 57 in late June and immediately got to work making sure the District was prepared for the technical requirements of remote learning. Fijor, who previously led technology in Skokie's Fairview School District 72, also worked with his team to provide support to families who experienced technical issues (responding to nearly 1,000 requests submitted via the online

form so far). Fijor is now preparing for the hybrid learning launch. "Mark's expertise and accessibility have been invaluable as we've all adjusted to the technology implications of this new way of teaching and learning," according to Elaine Aumiller, Ed.D., superintendent. In this interview, Fijor discusses his new role and District 57's tech preparations:

You started your job just as the District was beginning to plan remote learning and prepare more than 2,000 devices for students. What was involved, and how did you transition into this important role on such a tight timeline?

It was exciting to be part of vastly expanding the one-on-one computer program by making Chromebooks available to all students for the first time. In early July, we started receiving new equipment, getting it ready to send home and setting up usernames for every student. We were also making sure teachers were prepared for remote teaching. I collaborated with our instruction department to roll out Zoom and other new software tools like Newsela and Pear Deck. It helped to have a strong team that was knowledgeable and prepared. We couldn't have done it without District technology staff Allie Oyman and Maria Potratz and building technology associates

Dave Cessna (Lincoln), Dena Conway (Fairview), Sylvia Enquist (Lions Park) and Jenise Whisler (Westbrook).

There was no time to prepare for remote learning last spring. Since then, how has the tech team helped staff learn to use technology to improve the experience for students?

We've planned many professional development opportunities to help staff navigate this new approach, and we've framed them around applying effective instructional strategies, not just learning how to use the tools. Instructional technology coaches Ashley Patla at Fairview and Lions Park, Kim Stortz at Westbrook and Kate Sassatelli at Lincoln have provided a myriad of training so staff can share ideas and struggles and discuss new approaches for engaging students. The coaches also are meeting one-on-one with teachers to address specific issues and holding less formal training events like Ed Camp and "Appy Hours" to review new tools.

In terms of technology capabilities, is the District prepared for the coming months and a return to in-person learning?

The preparations up to this point have put us in a good place, and now we're beginning to map out the next six months to make sure we're able to continue supporting remote and hybrid, as well as full in-person when it comes. Everyone in this District works hard, and I have faith that our staff and students will build on the successes we've had so far. I grew up in Mount Prospect, and I know this is a special place. While it's been a challenging year, we've also been incredibly supportive of each other, and I believe we'll come out of this stronger than we were before. This community, when presented with a challenge, can rise to the occasion and accomplish great things.



READY TO RUN: Lincoln cross country was able to have a shortened, socially-distanced season this fall. Boys and girls in sixth to eighth grade took part in daily virtual warmups and independent runs and time trials, as well as weekly small-group in-person practices. They performed well in their three meets. Congratulations to the runners and coaches Steve Shaffer and Kelly Bailey. Pictured here: The eighth-grade boys team. (Photo by Steve Shaffer, District 57.)



SUMMER 2020 CONSTRUCTION: NEW-AND-IMPROVED PARKING LOTS, FLOORS AND MORE

This drone photo shows the Lions Park parking lot that was rebuilt and expanded over the summer, to address flooding and congestion. The Fairview lot also was rebuilt and expanded. Other recent projects include: at Lions Park, installing gym air conditioning; and at Lincoln, installing Busse Gym air conditioning, replacing classroom and locker room floors, repairing and repainting lockers, and adding two emergency generators. These projects were on the Master Facilities Plan, which prioritizes necessary improvements and helps the District address maintenance that was deferred in the years leading up to the referendum.

FINANCIAL UPDATE

AS PANDEMIC WEARS ON, DISTRICT PREPARES FOR BUDGET UNCERTAINTY AND PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

The District's [FY21 budget](#) was adopted in September, with a deficit and a fund balance decrease of \$516,505. This is the first time since the 2018 tax referendum passed that the District has been forced to use emergency reserves to fund operations. This is due to unexpected expenditures related to COVID-19, including the \$400,000 purchase of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and projected increased transportation costs related to the need to double bus routes when hybrid learning begins.

In addition to the added costs, the District expects significant decreases in state funding, and possibly lower federal funding, in the coming months and potentially years. At the Nov. 19 School Board meeting, Adam Parisi, assistant superintendent of finance and operations, presented five financial scenarios related to the pandemic and illustrated how each one could impact the District. Each scenario has different revenues and expenditures that the District could experience, depending on what happens in the months to come. The purpose of this analysis is to prepare for financial challenges that are likely, whether implementing hybrid, remote or full in-person learning. The slides outlining the scenarios can be found at this [link](#).

"Like many school districts and organizations, our financial picture is not as positive as it had been," Parisi says. "But thankfully, our reserves have been strong, and we're able to use them for costs related to bringing kids back."

Parisi and his team have spent many hours sourcing available PPE at the best prices – including face masks and shields, plexiglass for work areas and offices, hand sanitizer and electrostatic sprayers for sanitizing the buildings. The District is as prepared as possible for having kids in school, thanks to the investment in these items, he says.

The FY21 budget once again includes \$4 million that is set aside for recommended capital projects, including a potential Lions Park expansion. During the 2018 referendum campaign, the District indicated it could add on to Lions Park in 2021 at the earliest, if enrollment required it. With all classrooms now in use and cramped storage, the District believes it is time to pursue the expansion, to protect against larger class sizes. The other project being considered for 2021 is the completion of Lincoln's floor replacement (hallways and common areas). The District is seeking bids for the Lions Park and Lincoln projects, and the Board will review and vote on them in January. Work would take place in spring and summer.

JUMPING FOR JOY ON WESTBROOK'S NEW SENSORY FLOOR

A sensory floor was installed in Westbrook's early childhood hallway over the summer. The attractive new flooring helps young children improve their motor skills and learn counting and colors – plus, it's fun! Circle of Friends students who are receiving targeted, in-person services at Westbrook have enjoyed breaking in the new floor. (Photos by Jenny Kustra-Quinn, District 57.)



#D57GIVESBACK

PORCH TO PANTRY: HELPING FAMILIES LEND A HAND TO THOSE IN NEED

This fall, District 57 families have donated necessities for people in need – simply by setting items on their front porch. The donations are picked up and delivered to The Kids Pantry, a Mount Prospect organization that helps people throughout the northwest suburbs, including many District families. Melissa Ruggiero, wife of Lincoln computer teacher Bart Ruggiero, coordinates the no-contact donations through her new program called Porch to Pantry. She encourages community members to set items outside on designated Sundays (every other week), then she and a couple volunteers – District parents Jason Biggs and Laura Vocke – make the rounds and load their cars for The Kids Pantry. Melissa started Porch to Pantry after she donated diapers and realized the pantry was a lifeline for many. She says 900 people have reached out for help this season, and there are not enough donations to meet the need. She is now collecting hams, non-perishable food, new toys and Walmart/Target/Amazon gift cards. To schedule a pickup, email missy.ruggiero@gmail.com.



FIFTH GRADERS 'MAKING THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE'

Teacher Alana Davidov and her Lions Park fifth graders have embarked upon an ambitious COVID Kindness Project. They brainstormed ways they could make a difference for people who are struggling during these challenging times and decided to focus on the elderly. It's a true team effort, with tasks assigned to different groups. Students made Thanksgiving cards for a home care organization and postcards with positive messages for home meal deliveries. The class also organized a dine-and-share fundraiser that raised \$425 for Kenneth Young Center. Students are now creating care packages for the elderly, collecting granola bars, canned soup, gloves, stamps and travel-size lotion and hand sanitizer. Items can be dropped off at Lions Park until Dec. 18.

Davidov says she was impressed with her students' leadership and compassion, as they embraced the idea of helping those who are lonely due to the pandemic. "We've learned how to create something out of nothing using kindness. And this brought our class closer even though we can't physically be together right now," says Alaresa. Ella says she's proud of her classmates for "making the world a better place." And Paxton expresses hope that this "small ray of kindness" can spread throughout the community.



GRATEFUL STUDENTS TAKE PART IN VIRTUAL VETERANS DAY

District 57 schools were able to continue their proud tradition of being part of the Mount Prospect Veterans Day ceremony, even though this year's event had to be held virtually. Heidi Jorgenson's Lions Park second graders, Karen Noll's Fairview fifth graders and Trina Courtney's Lincoln eighth graders shared recorded messages of appreciation. Pictured here: A Lions Park second grader displays his patriotism and gratitude during the ceremony.



DR. AUMILLER TO RETIRE AFTER 12 YEARS OF LEADERSHIP



Elaine Aumiller, Ed.D., plans to retire at the end of this school year, after serving as District 57's superintendent for 12 years. "I have loved leading this school district and am so thankful to everyone in the community who has made it such a fulfilling experience," she says. "I'm proud of all we've accomplished together, and I'm confident our schools will continue to thrive under the leadership of the next superintendent."

School Board president Eileen Kowalczyk says the District has faced many challenges over the years, and she credits Aumiller for addressing them with the best interests of students, teachers and staff in mind at all times. "Dr. Aumiller was integral in passing the referendum, and has been an asset for the District in many ways," Kowalczyk says. "It has been an honor to work with her."

The School Board has enlisted the assistance of an educational search firm and plans to name the new superintendent in March. Community members are asked to provide input about characteristics of the ideal candidate, by filling out an [online survey](#) and attending a virtual open forum on Dec. 17 (for staff at 4 p.m. and community at 5:30 p.m.).