

THE PROUD 23 COMMUNITY Connection

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE PROSPECT HEIGHTS SCHOOL DISTRICT 23 COMMUNITY

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D23 PREPARES TO BREAK GROUND AT EISENHOWER AND PLANS FOR 2027 LAUNCH OF FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN

With the District about to start construction of the Eisenhower Elementary School addition, planning is underway for the fall 2027 implementation of full-day kindergarten. The Full-Day Kindergarten Committee has proposed a design for the new program, while the District is preparing for the financial impact.

The Eisenhower construction includes adding four classrooms and a second multi-purpose room, relocating the main office, establishing a new entry and creating a parking lot for drop-off/pickup. Work will start this spring and summer and be completed by August 2027, in time to meet the state mandate for full-day kindergarten. The addition, smaller than originally proposed, is part of a no-tax-impact plan to refinance debt to cover construction costs, while reducing staffing and/or programs to provide operational funds.

The Full-Day Kindergarten Committee, made up of teachers, support staff and administrators, asked parents and other stakeholders to provide input on program needs, and looked at examples of learning environments in neighboring districts. The committee then developed a proposed design that includes (in part):

- Maintaining class size guidelines, literacy stations, math curriculum and SEL time
- Increasing writing instruction, time for re-teaching skills, structured play and social interaction, small group instruction, PE to three times a week and parent/volunteer involvement opportunities
- Restructuring art, music and library to once a week

Superintendent Don Angelaccio, Ed.D., says expanded kindergarten will boost academic growth, decrease the need for remedial and intervention services, narrow the achievement gap for at-risk students and better meet social-emotional needs. "We're glad we will finally have space to comply with the mandate and provide this sought-after option for families," he says.

See P. 5 to learn how the District is planning for the increased costs of full-day kindergarten.



MAC BUILDING UPGRADES COMING THIS SUMMER

In addition to kicking off Eisenhower construction this summer, D23 will address urgent building maintenance at MacArthur Middle School. The work was delayed after the tax referendum did not pass; it will now be paid for through the debt-refinancing plan. The projects, expected to be completed this August, aim to protect the community's investment in the buildings, by:

- Improving safety and security
- Replacing outdated windows and siding
- Repairing and replacing exterior doors
- Improving energy efficiency to optimize classroom environment and save on utility costs

Also this summer, D23 is upgrading tech infrastructure and continuing phased library updates at Ross and Sullivan Elementary Schools, with new furniture going in.

A FEW WORDS FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

As I recently wrote in a message to families, I feel lucky to be superintendent of this vibrant school district where there are countless examples of students learning, growing and succeeding, and staff and families supporting and celebrating them. D23 is a special place!

This newsletter highlights recent progress and accomplishments – like the exciting Eisenhower expansion, preparations to finally bring full-day kindergarten to life, the successful Polar Plunge for Special Olympics, our superstar wrestling team, celebrations of the arts and much more! We also recently held our annual Heritage Night. I'm always proud to see families come out for this popular tradition that celebrates our rich cultures.

Of course, we also have challenges, like all school districts. But I'm confident we'll continue to come together to plan for them, and that we'll keep students' needs top of mind. To that end, we have

been working to better align spending and revenue, as we deal with increasing costs and other difficulties and prepare for the financial impact of full-day kindergarten.

Our needs are significant and not going away, and we have limited funding options. The debt-refinancing plan to build the Eisenhower addition does not fund operations or add long-term stability. So we must consider additional budget cuts and the possibility of a reduced tax referendum next November. We have not passed a referendum since 1987, and our funding is among the lowest, compared to neighboring districts. I am hopeful we can get the funds we need to level the playing field and continue to deliver the quality our community expects.

Read P. 5 to learn more, and stay tuned for updates.

I look forward to continuing to experience the high energy of our classrooms as I visit the schools this



Dr. Angelaccio at Heritage Night on April 8.

spring. And I hope to see families at year-end events in the coming weeks. As always, I am **PROUD TO BE D23!**

Don Angelaccio, Ed.D.

Superintendent of Schools,
Prospect Heights School District 23

SUCCESSION PLANNING UPDATE: SUPERINTENDENT JOB TO BE POSTED IN LATE SUMMER

The Board of Education's Succession Planning Committee has been gathering input about qualities that stakeholders would like to see in the next D23 superintendent. This is part of the effort to prepare for the retirement of Dr. Don Angelaccio, who is set to close out his current contract at the end of next school year.

The committee is conducting surveys and focus groups with the leadership team, staff, parents, students, community members and partners. Feedback and ideas shared will help develop a profile of the ideal candidate, to ensure the person selected is well qualified and a good fit for the D23 community.

The Board will post the job in August and conduct interviews in the fall, with the goal of selecting the next superintendent by January or February 2027. He or she will take office that summer.

In addition to the superintendent, other members of the District's small leadership team are expected to retire within the next five years, so the Succession Planning Committee also is preparing for those changes. The goal is to ensure continuity and smooth transitions so future leaders can build on the growth and success already achieved throughout District 23.



D23 BOARD WELCOMES NEW MEMBER

After soliciting applications and conducting interviews, the Board of Education chose Zara Summers (right) to replace member Brian Greidanus, who resigned this spring. The District thanks Greidanus for his years of volunteer service to the community. Board president Becky McClaney welcomed Summers at her first meeting on April 9, after she was nominated and approved to fill the remainder of the term, which expires in 2027.

MAC AND D23 TAKE POLAR PLUNGE TO RAISE \$20,000 FOR SPECIAL OLYMPICS

The temperature may have been slightly warmer than normal for early March, but the water was icy cold. That didn't stop brave students, staff and community partners from taking the Polar Plunge on March 6 outside of MacArthur. They dove right in as part of the Cool School Challenge, raising more than \$20,000 for Special Olympics of Illinois.



MacArthur students brave the icy water.



Sullivan teachers Mia Ferber, Elaine Wong and Kaelee Donahue help their MacArthur friends raise funds for Special Olympics.

This was the school's third consecutive year participating in this national fundraiser that supports year-round training and competition for children and adults with intellectual disabilities. To take the plunge, participants had to raise \$25, or \$100 to earn an official sweatshirt. There were also donations and raffles to support the cause.

More than 50 participants dove into the small pools set up outside the school, while the school community cheered them on. This included not just students and staff, including some from Sullivan, but members of the Prospect Heights Police Department, Fire Department and Park District.

"We are so proud of the enthusiasm around this event," says MacArthur principal Camron Nystrom, Ed.D. "It's a real celebration of the collaborative and inclusive mindset in our school and throughout District 23."

Nystrom says MacArthur also used the event to celebrate the school's own Unified programs, which provide inclusive leadership opportunities through advisory class, PE and extracurriculars that give students of all abilities the chance to learn, play and compete together.



Dr. Camron Nystrom, MacArthur principal, takes the plunge with the Mac mascot (i.e. assistant principal Mike Kaper).

SEL CURRICULUM RENEWAL: BUILDING STRONG RELATIONSHIPS AND SELF-AWARENESS A HIGHLIGHT OF D23'S PROVEN PROGRAM

A districtwide committee has completed an extensive review of D23's social-emotional learning (SEL) curriculum for students in early childhood through eighth grade. After exploring four options, the committee recommended the renewal of the District's Second Step curriculum for the next six years.

"Second Step is a proven program that builds vital skills and behaviors to help students thrive," says Craig Curtis, Ed.D., assistant superintendent for teaching and learning. "The SEL Committee appreciates that the curriculum is closely aligned with the CASEL core competencies, which provide a widely used framework for fostering self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making."

Curtis says the committee also feels that Second Step stands out for its flexibility and ease of use. The program also uses scientific research to back methodology, provides opportunities to dig deeper and includes interventions for

students who need more intense programming.

In addition, a mental wellness and bullying prevention curriculum is supported at all grade levels. Second Step includes engaging age-appropriate lessons that aim to build a safe, positive school climate where students feel respected, supported and ready to learn, according to Curtis. The materials also include family communication and take-home resources.

The SEL Committee was comprised of administrators and staff members from all four schools. They met regularly this school year to review SEL standards, along with program specifics and data from the four vendors. The committee's in-depth research also included surveying neighboring districts on SEL curriculum choices.

Curtis presented the committee's recommendation to the Board of Education at its monthly meeting on April 9, and the re-adoption was approved. Professional development on the materials will begin this summer.



MAC CELEBRATES HISTORIC, WINNING WRESTLING SEASON

MacArthur Wrestling recently wrapped up one of the best seasons in the program's history, finishing with a perfect 15-0 record, going 5-0 in conference and extending the conference winning streak to 25 consecutive meets. The team also had an incredible postseason, placing first at regionals and second at sectionals, with eight regional champions, two sectional champions and 10 state qualifiers.

MacArthur celebrated the wrestling team's hard work all season, culminating in an all-school sendoff for the eight wrestlers who headed to the state competition on March 13. Five of them placed at state (Harper in 1st, Maxym in 2nd, Bella in 3rd, Ryan in 6th and Cameron in 6th), capping off a historic year for the growing program.

The middle school's wrestling program has gained popularity in recent years, particularly among girls. There were 15 girls on the team this year. In a program first, MacArthur sent seven girls to a tournament, and all seven placed.

MacArthur is following the nationwide trend of a huge increase in the number of girls joining wrestling teams, from middle school through college. In fact, girls wrestling is the fastest-growing high school sport in Illinois, according to the IHSA (Illinois High School Association).



MacArthur wrestlers celebrate their winning streak and perfect record.



MacArthur's program has benefited from the growth of girls wrestling, with 15 girls joining the team this year and contributing to the historic season.



BUDDING ARTISTS ON DISPLAY

The Prospect Heights Public Library displayed artwork from local students in March, in celebration of Youth Art Month. At a reception honoring the young artists, this Eisenhower student was proud to show her family the Frida Kahlo self-portrait she created.

SPRING SPIRIT WEEK BRINGS OUT THE CRAZY HAIR

Ross second graders in Lisa Ravenscraft's class made the most of Crazy Hair Day as part of Spring Spirit Week, a schoolwide celebration in March.



FINANCIAL REVIEW

PREPARING FOR ADDED COST OF FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN AND OTHER CHALLENGES

Implementing full-day kindergarten at Eisenhower in 2027 will bring additional costs for staffing, operations and programs, with the annual increase projected to be \$405,407. To plan for this and better align spending and revenue, the District has been exploring sustainable solutions – including further reducing spending, increasing revenue through a tax referendum or a combination of the two.

Funds generated from these actions would cover full-day kindergarten operations only, not the Eisenhower addition – that will be funded through a no-tax-impact plan to refinance current debt (borrowing funds, paying off existing debt and extending payments for 30 years).

There is a growing gap between revenue and expenditures, even with significant budget reductions in recent years. The District, which has a lower tax rate than surrounding communities (see graphic), has not passed a referendum since 1987 and continues to operate with limited federal and state funding and unreliable Cook County property tax disbursements. At the same time, the cost of educating students – staffing, transportation, utilities, materials, etc. – continues to rise.

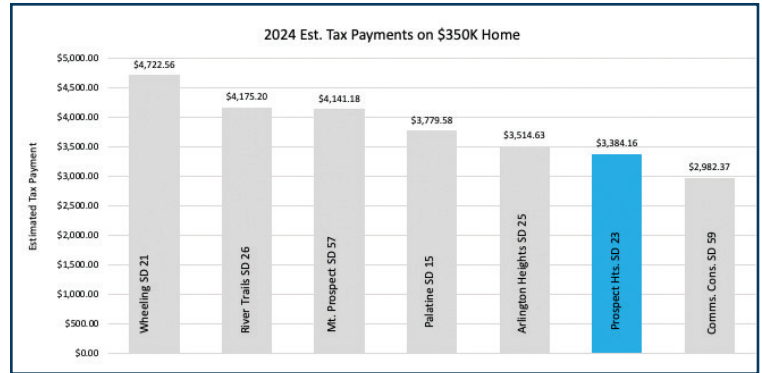
"Despite increasing costs and stagnant revenues, we remain committed to students and to stretching every dollar to maintain facilities and invest in classrooms where we can make the greatest impact," says superintendent Don Angelaccio, Ed.D.

He says the ongoing financial pressures, along with added operational costs of full-day kindergarten, which will soon be required by the state, present challenges that cannot be ignored. That's why the District is considering realistic solutions that would meet the most essential needs. This includes:

BOARD CALLS ON COOK COUNTY TO SOLVE COSTLY ISSUES WITH PROPERTY TAX SYSTEM

In February, the Board of Education approved a resolution demanding that Cook County resolve systemic issues related to property tax collection and distribution. The resolution calls on officials to implement solutions and safeguards to prevent the costly and disruptive failure of the property tax system. Here are three key facts to know:

- The resolution aims to draw attention to Cook County repeatedly failing to issue property tax bills on time and provide tax revenue in a reliable manner. This crisis affects hundreds of agencies dependent upon property tax revenue, including school, library and park districts statewide.



D23 has not passed a tax referendum in nearly 40 years and has a lower tax rate than surrounding districts.

Further Budget Cuts

Because voters did not approve the previous tax referendum, it will likely be necessary to further reduce spending districtwide next year. D23 already has made significant expenditure reductions, including 10% in FY2026. Future cuts could be increasingly difficult, with staffing and programs impacted.

Increasing Revenue Through a Scaled-Back Tax Referendum

The Board is considering placing a referendum on the ballot in November, to obtain funds to cover some full-day kindergarten increases and support long-term stability. It would be significantly lower than previous requests. A successful referendum would mean fewer staffing and program cuts.

These two options would only help support full-day kindergarten and maintain where the District currently is, not provide additional programs or services.

Decisions about budget cuts and the referendum will likely be made in August.

- District 23 needs approximately \$3 million each month to meet payroll and vendor obligations. Delayed disbursements have created serious cash-flow problems and have made it increasingly difficult to fund programs and ensure efficient operations.
- Cook County once again failed to issue 2024 second-installment property tax bills on time, due to administrative delays and a reported software glitch with Tyler Technologies. This required D23 to develop contingency plans – for the third time in four years – and led to lost interest revenue that currently totals about \$250,000. This is money that directly supports student learning and programs.

Read the complete resolution at www.d23.org (go to Making News at the bottom of the page and click on All Articles).



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OUR SCHOOLS

MacArthur Middle School

Grades 6-8
Dr. Camron Nystrom, Principal
Mr. Mike Kaper, Asst. Principal

Anne Sullivan Elementary

Grades 4-5
Ms. Traci Meziere, Principal

Betsy Ross Elementary

Grades 2-3
Ms. Stephanie Gage, Principal

Eisenhower Elementary

Grades PreK-1
Dr. Luke Lambatos, Principal

THE ARTS ARE IN BLOOM IN D23!

Every spring, the practice and preparation time pays off, as students display their talents during year-end band, orchestra and chorus concerts, as well as the musicals at Sullivan and MacArthur. Thank you to the teachers and staff who make these fine arts opportunities possible and to the families and fans who provide valuable support!

IN THIS ISSUE

- **Full-day on the way** – Committee proposes kindergarten design built to boost growth and support for the youngest learners
- **Aligning spending & revenue** – With rising costs and funding challenges, more budget cuts and/or scaled-back referendum could be on the horizon
- **Cool School Challenge** – Plungers brave the cold in support of Special Olympics
- **Historic season for growing wrestling team** – Mac wrestlers wrap up with perfect record
- **And more!**



This year's Sullivan musical was "Annie Jr.," with cast and crew delivering three performances over two days in March and receiving rave reviews. MacArthur also delighted audiences with its spring musical, "Shrek Jr."



MacArthur Orchestra's spring concert in March brought together performers from fourth to eighth grade and featured a guest performance by Los Gatos Salvajes, Wheeling High School's mariachi band. The energetic performance, which paid tribute to Music in Our Schools Month, was a powerful reminder of the power of music to unite students and communities and foster connection and creativity.