

## **District Leadership Team Meeting**

Monday, February 23, 2026 3:45 PM

Downers Grove Civic Center, 850 Curtiss Street, Downers Grove, Illinois 60515

1. **Call to Order and Roll Call**

2. **Approval of Minutes**

2.A. Minutes of the October 27, 2025 meeting

3. **Review Goals Progress**

3.A. February 2026 Progress Update

4. **Public Comment**

5. **Adjournment**

5.A. Adjournment

# **DOWNERS GROVE GRADE SCHOOL DISTRICT 58**

## **DISTRICT LEADERSHIP TEAM COMMITTEE MEETING**

**OCTOBER 27, 2025**

The District Leadership Team (DLT) met on Monday, October 27, 2025 at 4:00 p.m. at the Downers Grove Civic Center.

### **Call to Order**

Kirat Doshi called the meeting to order at 3:50 p.m.

### **Present**

Co-Chairs Kirat Doshi and Emily Hanus, Brent Borchelt, Liz Ehrhart, James Eichmiller, Greg Harris, Katie Hurckes, Melissa Jerves, Brennan Lazzaretto, Lisa Niforatos, Nicole Pieranunzi, Julie Relihan, Kevin Russell, Justin Sisul, Jessica Stewart, Craig Young.

### **Approval of Minutes**

Craig Young moved and Liz Ehrhart seconded the motion to approve the minutes from the May 19, 2025 meeting. Motion carried.

### **October 2025 Strategic Plan Progress Update**

#### **Goal 1: Focusing on Learning**

Building administrators began professional learning for the PLC+ model (professional learning communities), including how the model can look in our current data review process. The District completed a review of intervention systems and has begun refinement of the intervention process. The District was selected by the state to implement a mental health screening assessment by the end of the 2026-27 school year; the specific screening tool has not yet been shared by the state. The District has formed a working group to plan implementation of this initiative. A review of the collective use of Forefront at the elementary level has been conducted, and plans for continued support for principals and staff were developed to implement this school year. The Curriculum Department updated letters for notification of assessment scores, including information about the new NWEA MAP norms.

The District developed a framework for Seesaw use and gathered feedback from staff to refine practices. A draft technology framework will be developed to ensure that standards are covered and provide a cadence for introducing tools and applications to students. The District gathered feedback on current middle school exploratory classes and ideas for future programming.

### Goal 2: Connecting the Community

The initial implementation phase of ParentSquare, the District's new communication platform, has been completed. Engagement is already high; the District will begin testing the platform with selected teachers, clubs and activities, as well as instances where the platform's translation features would be helpful. New student induction guidelines have been established and posted on the website. The guidelines include a consistent set of components across the District, while each school retains some autonomy in its programming. A welcome publication will be developed to share with real estate agents and community organizations. Families will be surveyed to identify parent education programs and topics. The District will continue to leverage existing newsletters to share successes, both internally and externally. For parents of children with special needs, the principal's regular newsletter is the primary vehicle for sharing information. For students in a more supportive placement, families also receive a program coordinator newsletter. The District works closely with Building Bridges to share information with families.

### Goal 3: Securing the Future

Phase II elementary school construction is nearing completion; the project is on time and on budget. Surplus from Phase II will return to the owner's contingency to address cost overruns at the middle schools. Phase III bids are in review; these are anticipated to come in at or under budget. The total referendum construction budget is on target.

A final, balanced budget was approved by the Board in September. Due to increased costs and proration of funding from the state, the District is unable to meet the 35% fund balance and capital reserve policies. Having sufficient cash on hand at the low cash point in May will be challenging. The administration has proposed using the arbitrage rebate from the referendum bonds to cover the low cash point in 2026. Eventually a portion of the arbitrage rebate will be paid to the IRS. The administration and Financial Advisory Committee will work on revisions to the fund balance and capital reserve policies to ensure long-term financial stability. The District continues to explore possible revenue sources and savings opportunities, including seeking assistance from the County Board and state to offset rising costs (particularly in transportation) associated with the Interim Housing Center, applying for school maintenance project grants, finding efficiencies in transportation, and utilizing a state grant for \$500,000 to purchase kitchen equipment. Finally, the District will review its recent demographer's study to assess facility utilization and plan for future capital needs.

### Goal 4: Building for Success

The District is actively implementing the middle school transition plan, which provides ongoing support for staff, students and families as grade level configurations change. For special education students, the middle school transition is very structured, with additional up-front communication.

Staff created a video for parents of students with IEPs. The Middle School Special Education Coordinator position has been filled, which will also provide focused support.

Building utilization targets to ensure equitable use of space in each elementary school have been shared with the Board. The District will review the demographer's study to determine whether there is a need to review school boundaries.

The District created diagnostic assessments to match interventions to skill deficits to ensure the MTSS process is consistent across schools. Feedback will be sought from staff, students and families about the second year of the school-based gifted programming model. A joint committee with Henry Puffer and Preschool staff has been established to plan for the consolidation of the two preschool sites to one hosted by Henry Puffer. The new middle school schedule will offer opportunities for enhanced student experiences. Two exploratory periods will allow band/orchestra/choir to move to the school day and the expansion of the foreign language program. Students identified for intervention will still have one exploratory period in their schedules.

#### Goal 5: Cultivating Talent

Class sizes have been more closely aligned with published class size targets across schools. Specific plans are being developed to reduce a few large classes, and emphasis will be placed on ensuring equitable class sizes and access to staff resources as the new grade level configurations are implemented. The District continues to review extracurricular offerings and the revised stipend structure. A committee of PTA leadership and administration has convened to review PTA offerings and explore opportunities for equitable funding for comparable activities across the District. Our new Community Relations Coordinator has begun to redesign some staff celebrations, such as the October Principal Spotlight. Additional opportunities to recognize staff throughout the year are being explored. The District is proud of its onboarding process for new staff, and is exploring job fairs and partnerships with universities to help diversify the future applicant pool. "Stay interviews" will be conducted with staff members we want to retain, seeking improvements that could enhance their employee experience. The District already has strong partnerships with many community organizations, and hopes to host an event to bring them together and collaborate on future goals that support District 58 students. The committee discussed how partnerships could be leveraged for career exploration opportunities for middle school students.

#### Public Comment

No public comments were made.

#### Adjourn

Katie Hurckes moved and Emily Hanus seconded the motion to adjourn. The meeting was adjourned at 5:37 p.m.



# February 2026 District 58 Strategic Plan Progress Update

## View District 58's 2023-2028 Strategic Plan:

- [Vision 58 Document](#)
- [Strategic Plan Website](#)
- [Strategic Plan Prior Progress Updates](#)

## Status:

- Not Yet Begun
- Not Making Expected Progress
- Making Progress on Amended Timeline
- Making Expected Progress
- ☑ Complete

## Strategic Goal 1: Focusing on Learning: Curriculum, Assessment and Instruction

Leaders - [Jessica Stewart](#), [Liz Ehrhart](#), [James Eichmiller](#)

- **Objective 1.1** District 58 will set high expectations for all learners that are designed to meet their individual needs.
- **Objective 1.2:** Ensure students' availability for learning by measuring and supporting their behavioral needs, while also supporting mental health.
- **Objective 1.3:** District 58 will implement a systematic review of (multiple forms of) data to inform transparent instructional decision-making.
- **Objective 1.4:** Support students in the intentional use of technology to build digital literacy and citizenship.
- **Objective 1.5:** Commit to regularly evaluating and improving upon our curricular offerings to ensure that students have equitable access to broader areas of learning.

## February 2026 Update:

**1.1:** The administrative team continues to participate in our PLC+ book study. We are working through the 5 questions of PLC+ and developing systems for whole staff rollout. We will place focus on planning for instruction that uses data to support decisions and reviews student successes and challenges to drive learning forward.

Additionally, the MTSS K-5 Guidance Document implementation and professional learning for Specialists and Resource staff have been occurring throughout the year. Staff are utilizing the guidance document to make informed decisions about their students and using progress monitoring data to recommend intervention support. We are currently in the beginning stages of developing a similar process for middle school.

**1.2:** The Illinois State Board of Education has adjusted its timeline to support all Illinois Districts in implementing a mental health screening assessment for students in grades 3 through 8 by the end of the



# February 2026 District 58 Strategic Plan Progress Update

2027-28 school year, with a parent opt-out option. In preparation, key District 58 leaders have been actively participating in ISBE-sponsored professional learning focused on best practices for implementing and responding to a mental health screener. This work includes careful attention to systems of support, staff training, family communication, data privacy, and clear response protocols. Mental health support staff (social workers, psychologists, and counselors) have been reviewing and prioritizing six preparedness domains to inform the work ahead.

Seven of 13 buildings have trained at least two teachers and administration as Classroom Cultures trainers. Classroom Cultures, developed by Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI), is an evidence-based framework that returns to the core elements of strong classroom instruction and management. It reinforces predictable routines, clear expectations, and consistent adult responses, strengthening the foundational practices that support student regulation and engagement. This work complements our District's PBSS model and supports our goal of elevating calm, structured classrooms that remain productive, supportive places for teaching and learning.

Building-level positive behavioral support teams continue to promote positive behavior through monthly celebrations and recognition systems, while reviewing and responding to student behavior, strengthening our proactive support systems.

**1.3:** We continue to hold Tier 1 and 2/3 data meetings at each school, which supports the process of using data in determining student needs and instructional design. By focusing on all students throughout the tiers, this assists us in ensuring equitable practices. This has supported the staff's increased capacity in understanding the ECRA platform. Classroom teachers were supported in creating custom groups in their ECRA dashboard to allow them to focus on their individual class, as well as talk about grade-level data as a whole.

**1.4:** The technology skills framework was shared with staff at grade-level meetings, with emphasis on grade-level skills that are introduced and mastered across content areas. Additionally, teacher librarians are procuring resources to support digital citizenship and building lessons to address students' understanding of how to contribute in a digital world.

**1.5:** The Curriculum Department continues to evaluate the current curriculum review schedule and determine if adjustments to the calendar are needed. We are also looking at incorporating non-core content classes into the schedule, aligning specific programs with core content when appropriate. We will share this information with the Curriculum Council in April.

We have finalized the Middle School exploratory offerings and continue building content for each class, enhancing current offerings and building our new classes as well. Performing music and world language selections were due from next year's middle school students on February 20. We are in the process of connecting with the remaining families to ensure everyone is signed up for the correct courses.



# February 2026 District 58 Strategic Plan Progress Update

## October 2025 Update:

**1.1:** District 58 building administrators started their professional learning for the PLC+ model. This includes the introduction of the PLC+ model and discussions about how this can look in our current data review process. The District completed a review of our intervention systems and has begun refinement of the process.

**1.2:** ISBE announced that our District was selected as part of the statewide cohort to implement a mental health screening assessment by the end of the 2026–27 school year. In preparation, the District formed a working group to explore how best to implement this initiative in a manner that reflects our community's values and priorities.

**1.3:** The District conducted a review of the collective use of Forefront at the elementary level, including principal review of data. Plans for continued support were developed and will be implemented this school year. The Curriculum Department developed updated letters for notification of assessment scores, including information regarding the new NWEA MAP Assessment norms.

**1.4:** The District developed a framework for Seesaw use, including artifact examples and updated commitments for posting frequency. This framework was shared with staff and feedback was gathered to refine practices. Additionally, a draft technology framework will be developed to ensure coverage of standards and the cadence of introducing tools and applications to students.

**1.5:** The District gathered feedback regarding current exploratory classes and ideas for future planning of programming at the middle schools. Working groups have convened to build curriculum maps for our current offerings and the expansion of those offerings as well.

## Strategic Goal 2: Connecting the Community

Leaders - [James Eichmiller](#), [Julie Relihan](#)

● **Objective 2.1** - District 58 will build and enhance two-way communication that is equitable, inclusive, and culturally responsive.

● **Objective 2.2:** District 58 will foster strong relationships with all families and the extended community.

● **Objective 2.3:** District 58 will provide families with opportunities for parent/guardian education and collaboration based on needs.

● **Objective 2.4:** District 58 will provide and receive support from community partners to help with District 58 initiatives and resources.

● **Objective 2.5:** District 58 will build consistent collaboration opportunities between neighborhood schools to celebrate successes and shared learnings.



# February 2026 District 58 Strategic Plan Progress Update

## **February 2026 Update:**

**2.1:** We continue to enhance our ParentSquare usage. This includes pushing out our 100-day attendance letters and assessment scores via ParentSquare, which improves our efficiency and ensures more families see this important information. We are also in the early stages of implementing a middle school pilot for teachers to explore using this as a communications tool.

**2.2:** Our buildings have continued to implement the new student program. We are also in the process of drafting a brochure for incoming families that we will review with our committee in March.

**2.3:** We will survey families about parent education opportunities this spring. We will draft questions with our committee at the March meeting. We anticipate a few simple questions that will be sent via ParentSquare.

**2.4:** The work of this goal is aligned with Goal 5.

**2.5:** We are continuing to work on newsletter feature items that highlight the outstanding work happening in our District. Current examples include the staff shout-outs and student celebration features in 58 Connects and Communicate 58.

## **October 2025 Update:**

**2.1:** The initial phase of our ParentSquare deployment was completed. Our engagement levels have been extremely high as our community becomes more familiar with the new platform. This school year, we will begin testing the platform with selected classroom teachers, clubs, and other areas that could benefit from improved translation tools.

**2.2:** The District has established new student induction guidelines. While each school maintains some autonomy in welcoming new students and families, these guidelines create a consistent set of components across the District. This school year, we will also develop a welcome publication to share with real estate agents and other community organizations.

**2.3:** This school year, the District will review existing survey data and develop additional questions to identify the parent education programs and topics families would like to see offered. The District will also continue to share existing opportunities, such as the Glenbard Parent Series.

**2.4:** This plan has some overlap with work being completed in Goal 5. The Committee will monitor that work and determine if it aligns with this goal.

**2.5:** The District will continue to leverage existing newsletters and explore additional ways to share our successes, both internally and externally.



# February 2026 District 58 Strategic Plan Progress Update

## Strategic Goal 3: Securing the Future: Finance and Facilities

Leaders - [Greg Harris](#), [Kevin Russell](#)

- **Objective 3.1:** District 58 shall oversee and ensure referendum resources with an eye on timely and efficient project completion.
- **Objective 3.2:** District 58 shall continually plan to make sure resources are available to support District initiatives.
- **Objective 3.3:** District 58 shall maintain balanced budgets by complying with existing Board policies and implementing a capital policy
- **Objective 3.4:** District 58 shall explore possible revenue sources and achieve savings.
- **Objective 3.5:** District 58 shall preserve buildings long-term with appropriate investment and efficient utilization.

### February 2026 Update:

**3.1:** To date, all referendum projects remain on time and on budget. The District has successfully completed Phase I and II projects at the elementary level. The District is also on target to complete the middle school work this spring. Phase III projects have been approved, and all of the work is scheduled to be completed before the start of next school year.

**3.2:** The Board of Education approved a balanced budget for FY 2026 in September. Since that time, the administration has been focused on cash flow and five-year planning. Despite having a balanced budget, the low fund balances at the beginning of the year make it difficult for the District to meet all of its payroll and accounts payable obligations in the month of May (prior to receiving early tax receipts in late May/early June). The District has solved the problem for the next two fiscal years by leveraging the arbitrage profit from the referendum bond sale. This money is available for the District until it is due to the IRS in February of 2028. In order to understand the trajectory of this low cash problem, the District conducted a sophisticated analysis of revenues and expenditures over the next five years to understand the impact on year-end fund balances. After consulting with the Financial Advisory Committee, the administration recommended a \$1.5 million cut in expenditures from the FY 2027 budget. These cuts put the District in a much better financial position through Fiscal Year 2031 with projected surpluses and more dollars set aside for capital improvements.

**3.3:** With new leadership in the business office as of the current fiscal year, the District has revised its methods for budgeting and forecasting. By calculating year-end fund balances on a cash basis instead of employing a modified accruals method, the District's financial data portrays a different picture of the overall financial health of the organization. With fund balances calculated on a cash basis, it is apparent that the FY 2026 budget is far from meeting the Board of Education's fund balance policy. And with only a slim surplus in the operating funds, an investment of District resources in capital improvements was not likely in the current fiscal year, given the available resources. Following the guidance of the Financial Advisory Committee, the administration will be recommending revised policies to the Board of Education at the March regular meeting.



# February 2026 District 58 Strategic Plan Progress Update

These policies will comport with the District's current financial reality and provide the guidance necessary to meet the Board's goals when it comes to fund balances and investment in infrastructure.

**3:4:** The District has successfully pursued several options to increase revenue over the past year. The District has availed itself of funds from the National School Lunch Program to help offset the costs of lunches for students who qualify for free or reduced lunches. The District has secured a \$500,000 grant with the help of Representative Anne Stava that will be used to purchase kitchen equipment, which will be used to expand hot lunch programs to all elementary schools. The District has also been awarded a \$50,000 state grant to be used for the maintenance of school buildings. The administration continues to pursue funding opportunities from DuPage County and the Illinois State Board of Education to offset the rising costs associated with educating students from the Interim Housing Center. Thanks to new and updated facilities paid for by the 2022 referendum, the District is also bringing in new revenue from renting out school spaces (gymnasias, etc.) to groups in the community. The administration is also scrutinizing every dollar spent in order to achieve savings, small and large. Of note, the District's efforts to find efficiencies in transportation services have been a big success, yielding considerable savings in the current fiscal year alone.

**3.5:** The last dollars from the proceeds of the 2022 referendum bond sales will be spent within the next year. Despite an enormous amount of investment in the schools, the District understands that regular maintenance is required to keep the buildings looking as good as they do when all the referendum work is completed. The District has structured its five-year planning to include an annual investment in infrastructure of \$750,000 (with a CPI-based escalator). The District has commissioned a demographic survey to ensure that buildings are being utilized to the fullest extent possible. Where the administration identifies some available spaces based on expected usage by District 58 students, agreements are being made with SASSED to rent out classrooms for the use of students enrolled with the special education cooperative.

## **October 2025 Update:**

**3.1:** Phase II Elementary schools are nearing completion (only punch list items remain). Phase II was on budget and on time (elementary schools). The District anticipates a surplus from Phase II that will be returned to "owners' contingency." This surplus will help address cost overruns (construction contingency funds) at the middle schools. Bids for Phase III are currently being reviewed. A detailed presentation of the current status of all construction projects (including budget) will be given at the Board meeting on 11/10. The District anticipates that the bids for Phase III (elementary schools) will also come in under or at budget (the review process is ongoing). Overall, the total budget for the referendum is in good shape and will continue to be closely monitored.

**3.2:** The District presented a detailed tentative budget at the August meeting prior to a final budget being approved in September. The budget is balanced and has a surplus of funds. Due to increased costs and proration from ISBE, the District is unable to meet the Board's 35% fund balance and capital policies. Consequently, the District does not project that it will be able to have sufficient cash on hand to endure its low



# February 2026 District 58 Strategic Plan Progress Update

cash point in May. The administration is working closely with the FAC and Board to address this issue (in the short and long terms). While the District believes it will be able to continue to support its initiatives in subsequent years, further reductions will have to be made. The District no longer receives COVID revenue, state funding for transportation and special education is being prorated, and inflation is causing costs to continue to rise well past new revenue. The temporary fix will be to utilize the arbitrage funds from the referendum to cover the low cash point.

**3.3:** The Board of Education passed a surplus budget in September. The FAC is working closely with the administration to revise the fund balance and capital policies to ensure long-term fiscal stability. This work is ongoing and will be completed by the spring.

**3.4:** The District is pursuing alternate revenue streams. Examples include seeking assistance from the DuPage County Board to offset the rising costs associated with the Interim Housing Center (IHC) and revamping the District's facility rental practices. The District has also requested additional funds from ISBE. The District was recently awarded the School Maintenance Grant from ISBE totaling \$50,000. The District also received another grant from Representative Anne Stava-Murray for \$500,000 to purchase kitchen equipment. These funds will allow the District to serve hot lunch at the elementary schools next fall. In addition to continually exploring alternative funding sources, the District is actively reducing areas of its budget. Reductions were made this school year, and further reductions will have to be made next school year. The reason budget reductions must continue to take place is that the revenue streams the District receives are outpaced by expenses. There is no longer additional funding from the federal government tied to the COVID pandemic, and ISBE continues to prorate the District's reimbursements for transportation and special education costs. In order to maintain fiscal stability, reductions must be made.

**3.5:** The 2022 referendum funds, coupled with a long-term capital policy, will assist the District in meeting this objective. Additionally, the District has commissioned a demographic study to ensure buildings are being utilized to the fullest extent possible. In the event a building is not fully utilized, the District partners with SASSED to rent out available space(s). Looking beyond the referendum-related construction projects, the District will begin planning for five years' worth of capital projects to keep the community's new and improved school spaces in the great condition that they are in now. A five-year budget will be drawn up for capital improvements for post-referendum work, and the District will plan strategically to make sure enough money is available each year to afford progress towards these objectives.

The District has changed leadership in the Business Office and hired a new Chief School Business Official. Previous projection models have proved unreliable. Dr. Harris has and will continue to create new projection models based on cash and not accruals to ensure accuracy.



# February 2026 District 58 Strategic Plan Progress Update

## Strategic Goal 4: Building for Success: Implementing the New PK-5 and 6-8 Models Leaders - [Jessica Stewart](#), [Liz Ehrhart](#)

- **Objective 4.1:** District 58 will work to ensure smooth transitions to a 6-8 middle school model for all stakeholders, especially in the first year of transition.
- **Objective 4.2:** District 58 will work to ensure equitable access to curricular, programmatic and instructional resources, through the examination of school boundaries based on building utilization.
- **Objective 4.3:** The District will examine the use and implementation of resources that provide intervention and enrichment to the student experience (curricular and extra-curricular).
- **Objective 4.4:** The pre-k/5 elementary structure will be examined in order to optimize opportunities and innovative experiences.
- **Objective 4.5:** Middle school structure will be examined in order to optimize opportunities and innovative experiences.

### February 2026 Update:

**4.1:** The District has held staffing conversations with everyone who will be moving to the Middle School for the upcoming school year. Staff were welcomed with an open house opportunity to meet and connect with new colleagues. Welcome letters were sent to all incoming students from the District and the schools. We shared information about selecting performing music and world language classes, and we are wrapping up those forms. Master scheduling will occur now that we have the number of students for specific classes, including math, gifted ELA, performing music, world language and others.

We also created a Middle School transition dashboard, which includes important information for families and provides an opportunity to ask questions, which have been built into an FAQ. PTAs are planning for 5th and 6th grade end of the year experiences. Dates for Future Senator and Spartan nights, as well as Sneak Preview and Middle School Locker Night, have been shared with families.

**4.2:** Building principals have used the building utilization targets to plan for the upcoming school year. The building maps will be reviewed and adjusted since the initial discussion. This will ensure an equitable use of space in each of our elementary schools. The District is currently awaiting review of the District demographer to determine if there is a need to review elementary school boundaries.

**4.3:** MTSS K-5 Guidance Document implementation and professional learning for Specialists and Resource staff have been occurring throughout the year. Staff are utilizing the guidance document to make informed decisions about their students and using progress monitoring data to recommend intervention support. We are currently in the beginning stages of developing a similar process for middle school.

**4.4:** Grove Children's Preschool and Henry Puffer School's transition planning committee has examined and advised on shared spaces, arrival and dismissal procedures, as well as mentorship opportunities between



# February 2026 District 58 Strategic Plan Progress Update

intermediate students and our preschool classrooms. Early next month, the committee will solidify plans for promoting a shared culture of collaboration among the adults. Relocation logistics and site readiness preparations with the District's Buildings and Grounds Department are underway.

**4.5:** We have finalized the Middle School exploratory offerings and continue building content for each class, enhancing current offerings and building our new classes as well. Performing music and world language selections were due from next year's middle school students on February 20. We are in the process of connecting with the remaining families to ensure everyone is signed up for the correct courses.

## **October 2025 Update:**

**4.1:** The District remains on track and is actively implementing the middle school transition plan, which includes ongoing support for both staff, students, and families to ensure a smooth shift in our grade level configurations.

**4.2:** The District shared building utilization targets with the Board of Education. This will ensure an equitable use of space in each of our elementary schools. The District is currently awaiting review of the District demographer to determine if there is a need to review elementary school boundaries.

**4.3:** The District created a flowchart to identify appropriate diagnostic assessments and match interventions to skill deficits to ensure a robust MTSS process that is consistent across all schools. Additionally, the year 2 elementary gifted program curriculum is being utilized in our school-based programming model.

**4.4:** Grove Children's Preschool and Henry Puffer School are implementing a joint committee to explore opportunities and plan for potential areas of focus, as the preschool will be hosted exclusively at Henry Puffer next school year.

**4.5:** The new middle school schedule offers opportunities to enhance student experiences. New and existing exploratory classes are being revised and built to engage students during the school day.

## **Goal 5: Cultivating Talent (Maximizing the Potential of Students, Staff, and Families)**

**Leader - [Justin Sisul](#)**

● **Objective 5.1:** District 58 will analyze and explore our existing and potential staffing practices and structures in order to achieve more equitable experiences for all students.

● **Objective 5.2:** District 58 will review, expand, and support equitable opportunities for students to explore and develop their individual talents

● **Objective 5.3:** District 58 will establish a culture that recognizes, celebrates, develops, and supports the talents that exist within the District to promote the retention of staff.



# February 2026 District 58 Strategic Plan Progress Update

● **Objective 5.4:** District 58 will recruit and attract high-quality staff who are representative of the larger community (for all positions).

● **Objective 5.5:** District 58 will engage with the local community to enhance the student, staff, and school experience

## February 2026 Update:

**5.1:** In December, we shared a presentation with the Board of Education that walked through the process that will be used to determine class configurations for the 2026-27 school year. In January, we outlined budgetary reductions that, while impactful to staffing across the District, maintain the ability to provide equitable experiences for students. Notably, we are emphasizing the maintenance of class size targets across the District. While neighborhood schools make it nearly impossible to equalize class sizes, we want to ensure basic, consistent guardrails that are applicable district-wide.

As we move closer to the K-5 / 6-8 model, additional time and focus are being placed on ensuring that our soon-to-be new middle school staff receive training and support as they prepare for next school year. While generally these teachers will be in curricular areas that are familiar, the model and environment will be different and we are committed to supporting them throughout this transition.

**5.2:** The District Equity Leadership Team (DELT) is in the final stages of developing a student survey for incoming intermediate students (current 2nd-4th grades) and incoming middle school students (current 5th-7th graders) regarding their interests in activities, etc. to be administered in the spring in an effort to ensure that our offerings are truly aligned with student interests. At the Curriculum Workshop, we will discuss at a high level the offerings for middle school students in the new 6-8 model as well.

The PTA One Community committee continues its work this year, gathering background information across the PTAs in the District. At a recent meeting, we reviewed the budgets of individual school PTAs to gain a more thorough understanding of funding levels and offerings at different buildings. The group continues to gain momentum, and at our spring meetings, we expect to narrow the focus toward some tangible, implementable ideas that can help ensure equity of student opportunities provided through the PTA across the District.

**5.3:** We are continuing to expand our recognition and celebratory efforts. The addition of Julie Relihan to our team has brought a high level of professionalism and quality to our social media postings, as well as the characterization of recognition (Principal Appreciation Month, for example, was expanded and very well received). We also continue to seek and celebrate new community partnerships that recognize our staff - the Castle Teacher of the Year program is something that we worked closely to help launch, and we were proud to see many of our teachers honored (and the winner, in fact, being a District 58 teacher!) Work will continue in this area throughout the year; we hope to bring forward a Board recognition concept for staff before the end of the school year, as well as looking to continue to find ways for the Board to recognize individual students and groups of students on a much more regular, public basis.



# February 2026 District 58 Strategic Plan Progress Update

**5.4:** A subcommittee of administrators from the District Equity Leadership Team has been formed to discuss recruitment and retention strategies, with a focus on hiring processes and procedures to ensure that we are casting the widest possible net across our candidate pools for all positions. We have initiated conversations to build deliberate partnerships with several colleges and universities that have not typically sent students to District 58 for observation, practicum or student teaching hours in the hope that we might encourage a further diverse pool of pre-service teachers to experience what we have to offer in District 58. We also plan to participate in at least two job fairs this spring. While we expect to be hiring a smaller group of educators this fall than in typical years, we want to increase our presence and visibility at these events, recognizing that each appearance has a financial and resource cost to the District. The DELT reviewed data from ISBE's Equity Journey Continuum, and while we recognize a goal of recruiting staff members who are more representative of our student demographic population, we also acknowledge that from a state lens, this is actually an area where we are recognized for having "minimal gaps" - that is, based on their measurements, the comparison of staff/student demographics is a minimal gap in equity for District 58 as compared to much of the state of Illinois. This doesn't change our focus in this area, but does provide some perspective.

**5.5:** We are planning an outreach/connection event for all of our community partners before the end of this school year, with a goal of both celebrating those partnerships and looking for further opportunities and connections to support our students and families. The District 58 community is always willing to step up when needed, and we hope to continue to provide new opportunities to connect their generosity and support with the students, families and programs that can most benefit from those resources.

## **October 2025 Update:**

**5.1:** The District began the school year with class sizes that more closely align with our published targets across our schools, as reported at the September Board meeting. In some cases, spring planning and projections did not unfold exactly as anticipated, and a few areas (particularly in middle school) are exceeding targets more than we had hoped. Plans are being developed to reduce a couple of larger classes (over 30 students), and as we approach the 6–8 transition, we will place significant emphasis on ensuring equitable class sizes and access to staff resources across all 13 buildings as we implement the new K–5 / 6–8 model.

**5.2:** In June, the District reviewed the revised stipend structure, which supports all extracurricular activities (including sports, clubs, and music outside the school day etc.) and developed supporting documents to provide additional clarity for staff. This information was shared with staff this fall. In early spring, the District will release a student and staff survey to help guide planning for next year's activity offerings.

Additionally, the One Community Committee - comprised of PTA leadership and administrators - met for the first time in September. The group's charge is to review PTA offerings and explore opportunities to ensure equitable funding for comparable activities across the District, while continuing to honor the unique character and composition of each school community. The first meeting focused on brainstorming ideas and the committee looks forward to developing recommendations for implementation in the 2026–27 school year.



# February 2026 District 58 Strategic Plan Progress Update

**5.3:** With the addition of Julie Relihan as our Community Relations Coordinator, we have already seen some redesign of staff celebrations, notably our Principal Spotlight during October. We are beginning to explore additional opportunities to recognize staff across all roles and buildings throughout the year — both formally and informally, and in more public ways. We look forward to sharing more about these efforts in the coming months!

**5.4:** District 58 welcomed a smaller group of certified staff this year compared to previous years, but we continue to take pride in both our new hires and our onboarding processes. We are currently exploring spring job fairs to attend and developing partnerships with universities whose student populations can help diversify our future applicant pool. These partnerships may also include expanded student teaching opportunities within District 58.

The District has identified a list of staff to invite to participate in “stay interviews,” based on recommendations from our administrative team. These interviews are typically conducted with staff members we hope to retain in District 58 who may be at a point in their career (or possess specific qualifications) that could make them more mobile. The purpose of a stay interview is to better understand what motivates an employee to remain in their role and what improvements could enhance their experience. Our goal is to complete these interviews during the first half of the year so that any feedback received can be acted upon before the end of the school year.

**5.5:** In considering this objective, we recognize that District 58 already has strong and growing partnerships with many community organizations. The Downers Grove Fire Department, Police Department, Public Library, grit2, the Downers Grove Lions Club, and many others actively support our staff and students in both visible and behind-the-scenes ways. We are also deeply grateful for the generosity of local organizations, sometimes through large gestures, such as the Office Depot shopping spree for our middle school staff, and sometimes through smaller but equally meaningful acts, like donations of supplies and gifts for families in need. This spring, we hope to host an event that brings these partners together to express our gratitude and to collaborate on future goals to support District 58 students.