

Community Digest

Building a foundation for learning, leadership and life

Fall 2018



Dates to
remember

See <http://www.sd735.org/calendar> for all events.

Dec. 13—Second and third grade music concert, 7 p.m., McCracken Middle School, 8000 East Prairie Rd.

Dec. 17—Winter band concert, 2 p.m., McCracken.

Dec. 18—Winter band concert, 7 p.m., McCracken.

Dec. 20—First grade music concert, 6 p.m., Middleton.

Dec. 24—Winter break begins. No school for two weeks.

Jan. 7, 2019—School resumes.

Jan. 9—Community Forum, 7 p.m., McCracken.

Jan. 17—Middleton Family Painting Night, 6:30 p.m., Middleton.

Jan. 21—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. No school.

Jan. 25—Meyer Movie Night, 6 p.m., Elizabeth Meyer School, 8100 Tripp Ave.

Jan. 28—Spring parent-teacher conference registration opens.

Board meetings—The Board of Education meets at 7 p.m. on the second Tuesday of each month at McCracken unless noted. All community members are invited to attend.

Skokie School District 73½
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Expanded Meyer School earns praise

Meyer School was featured in the October 2018 issue of *Learning by Design* magazine, a publication that highlights excellence in design and innovation in educational facilities. The school was cited as an “outstanding project” in the new-construction category.

That award follows the transformation of the Meyer facility that took place in 2017. The most obvious change is construction of 23,000-square-foot addition that alleviated a severe space crunch. The addition contains six new classrooms as well as a new library, gym, art and music room, and a gross-motor room for children with special needs.

Outside the school is a new playground, new parking lot and additional green space. Out of view, there is an energy-efficient heating and cooling system and an underground storm-water detention system.

Meyer is an early-education center for children in preschool and kindergarten. The original facility had two preschool classrooms and five kindergarten classrooms. Adding classrooms made it possible to convert four of the former kindergarten classrooms into preschool classrooms.

That increase in space is particularly beneficial for special education students. It made it possible for District 73½ to accommodate students from other districts who used to attend preschool at the Molloy Education Center run by the Niles Township District for Special Education (NTDSE).

Of the 111 preschool students at Meyer in mid-November, 32 were referred by NTDSE. They receive services from 24 NTDSE staff members. In addition to teachers and teacher assistants, they include a music therapist, art therapist, adaptive PE teacher, occupational therapist, physical therapist, vision specialist, mobility specialist, speech/language pathologist and psychologist.



Young students participate in music therapy at Meyer School.

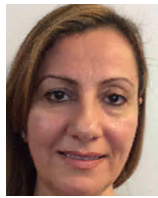
Francesca Pilati coordinates the NTDSE staff, spending three days a week at Meyer. “We have been received with open arms and quickly became part of the school community,” Pilati said. “The chance for our kids to be together with their regular education peers is a big plus. Children at that age are so accepting, and this school is so diverse, it’s been easy for them to fit right in. I love it.”

One of the NTDSE teachers, Sharon Sanfilippo added, “NTDSE staff and students have been welcomed in and made to feel like we’re part of the whole school, not pushed off to the side. And there are many opportunities for our students to mix with the other students — in the hallways, on the playground, at all-school assemblies. It’s a wonderful facility and here we have the luxury of integration with the whole

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Allison Acevedo



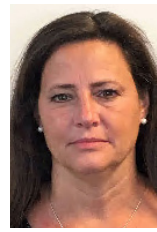
Manar Alzaeem



Salvador Cazares-Banderas



Colleen Cox



Sue Dentzler



Taylor Dickinson



Karen Hayes



Martin Heffner



Gay Kanda



Stephanie Larenas



Angela Lum



Kimmie Marshall



César Mendoza



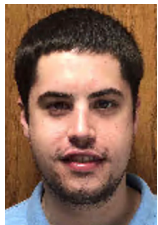
Katie Mormolstein



Tim Peng



Maggie Price



Jack Reid



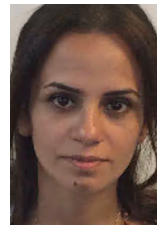
Jose Rodriguez



Karen Schertzing



Samia Sharief



Hannah Sher



Nina Slefo



Anthony Surdo



Michael Torres

Welcome, new staff!

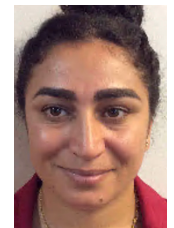
Allison Acevedo—5th grade Teacher at Middleton
Manar Alzaeem—Instructional Assistant at Middleton
Salvador Cazares-Banderas—Custodian at McCracken
Colleen Cox—Instructional Assistant at Meyer
Sue Dentzler—Administrative Assistant at McCracken
Taylor Dickinson—Special Education Kindergarten

Teacher at Meyer
Karen Hayes—Administrative Assistant, Business Office/Special Projects
Martin Heffner—Dean of Students at McCracken
Gay Kanda—Long-term Substitute Preschool Teacher at Meyer
Stephanie Larenas—Assistant Principal at Middleton
Angela Lum—Accounts

Payable
Kimmie Marshall—Instructional Assistant at McCracken
César Mendoza—Assistant Band Director
Katie Mormolstein—Instructional Assistant at Middleton
Tim Peng—Instructional Assistant at Middleton
Maggie Price—Special Education Teacher at McCracken

Jack Reid—Part-time 8th grade Social Studies Teacher at McCracken
Jose Rodriguez—Custodian at Middleton
Karen Schertzing—School Nurse at Middleton
Samia Sharief—ELL Teacher at Middleton
Hannah Sher—Instructional Assistant at Middleton
Nina Slefo—8th grade Math

Teacher at McCracken
Anthony Surdo—Instructional Assistant at Middleton
Michael Torres—Director of Buildings and Grounds
Lina Wardah—Instructional Assistant at McCracken



Lina Wardah

New administrative team set at McCracken

A new trio of administrators is in place at McCracken Middle School this year.

Principal Nancy Ariola taught in Chicago before coming to the district five years ago. "When I started as dean of students at McCracken in 2013, I was excited to begin my administrative career in this fantastic community. I was — and still am — impressed not only with the number of families actively involved in the schools and their children's education, but with the staff and administrators who work tirelessly to ensure students' needs are met."

Last year, Ariola was at Middleton School as the assistant principal. Now back at McCracken, she said, "Our school year is off to a great start, with students involved in a wide range of academic and enrichment experiences and opportunities."

The new assistant principal is Marty Behm, who was dean of students last year. He has a bachelor's degree from Ohio University and a master's in educational administration from Northeastern Illinois University. He spent 11 years as a middle-school teacher in Evanston District 65.

"McCracken is getting used to a new administrative team, but so far the response by staff, students and the community has been so welcoming and amazing," Behm said.

Taking over from Behm as dean of students is Martin Heffner. He also comes from District 65, where he taught middle school math for six years. He has a bachelor's degree in education from the University of Kentucky and a school leadership degree from Northeastern Illinois University.

New report cards emphasize student growth

As the first trimester comes to a close in District 73½ schools, parents and students are getting their first look at the new report cards that are being introduced this year.

Educators refer to this new approach as standards-referenced grading. That means the report cards will describe what individual students are learning and how they are progressing on a given learning standard — a statement that describes what a student should know and be able to do in a subject area. There is no “average” grade; progress is measured using a proficiency scale. The report cards are similar for all grade levels K-8.

“The focus is now on a student’s growth and the continuation of learning and progress rather than simply what grade they earned,” said Carrie Eccleston, a 6th grade science and social studies teacher. “It is an ever-changing report of growth and learning.”

Progress is measured in academic areas such as math and reading, as well as non-academic areas such as citizenship and cooperation with peers. Both areas are keyed to state and national learning standards. The proficiency scale reflects what skills and processes students are adept at and which ones they are struggling with. Students receive one of four proficiency ratings in each area: extends, meets, approaching, and does not meet the standard.

Each subject has multiple learning standards, which evolve from one grade to the next. Eccleston explained, “In a class like science, students may be meeting the performance expectation for ‘conduct an investigation’ but may be approaching the standard for ‘developing a model.’ This information lets parents know specifically what their children are understanding and what they need more help with.”

One aspect of the new report cards that may take some getting used to is the absence of letter grades. Jim Bruton, a 6th grade English language arts teacher, said, “An example I often give parents is: if your child earned a ‘B’ before, that would not necessarily tell you anything about your child’s abilities. It could be that your child was a strong writer, but struggled in reading. It could mean that your child understood fiction, but struggled with nonfiction. Now, with standards-referenced grading, parents and students will get a clear picture of the student’s overall strengths and needs.”

In applying the new approach to grading, K-8 teachers are using rubrics that they have been developing for several years. Last year a number of teachers piloted the new grading system with about 240 students in 6th grade and 8th grade to see how the rubrics work in practice.

“The pilot went smoothly,” Eccleston said. “There was a learning curve to get our rubrics up to speed and to really reflect the standards clearly, but we were able to do it easily. We updated the report cards over the summer of 2018 to better reflect the standards we taught.” All teachers in the district have been trained to use the rubrics and complete the new report cards.

Molly Domingo, a 2nd grade teacher at Middleton School, said, “I am most excited about the changes I see in how my students view learning. This year the students are much more focused on the process of learning and revising their work. After reviewing a rubric one of my 2nd grade students said, ‘It doesn’t have to be perfect yet, it’s all about the learning!’ The students have been introduced to standards-referenced grading and see it each day in action

through rubrics, checklists, and discussions.”

Eccleston and Bruton both think parent-teacher conferences are more positive and productive than in the past.

Eccleston said, “Parent-teacher conferences have become much more student-centered and focused on the learning. Because all teachers pre-test at the beginning of a unit, we can really chart out the growth of the students over time. This is powerful for students as well. They are starting to set goals and chart their own growth.”

Bruton said, “Standards-referenced grading provides specific talking points about a student’s learning and growth. This method of reporting becomes even more powerful as parents and students can see growth. For example, I showed parents their child’s rubric for a standard from the beginning of a unit. Then we compared it to the rubric for the same skill later in the unit. Parents were able to see how their child progressed.”

The new approach to grading requires considerable time and effort from teachers. It also results in a longer, more complicated report card, which may be daunting for some parents, especially those who have limited English.

Domingo said, “Standards-referenced grading is a new way of thinking, and change can be hard. I would encourage parents to ask questions of teachers and administrators, review their children’s rubrics, check out the school website and talk with their children about the change in grading. Instead of simply reporting an overall averaged grade, this new approach to report cards helps teachers, parents, and most importantly students understand exactly what students are taught in each subject and how they are doing.”

More information about the new report cards is available at www.sd735.org/cia/standards-referenced-grading.

Meyer School

Continued from page 1

student body. For our students, it feels like they’re coming to a neighborhood school.”

Meyer principal Alison Gordon said, “The transition involved in bringing NTDSE staff and students into our newly expanded school has been seamless.”

Gordon is justifiably proud of the remodeled and expanded facility. “The old library is now a much-needed and much-used conference room,” she said. “The new library is much larger than the old one, with a high ceiling and lots of windows — it’s just flooded with light. It even features a Lego wall and a maker space.”

The new gym is actually a multipurpose room with a large projection screen, automated shades for the windows and a superior sound system. The floor is designed with a large circle in the middle and divided into quadrants with 24 smaller colored circles in each section, making it easy to group children from the same classroom together. “The playground is a magnet, and all children are allowed to play on all of the equipment, regardless of age or ability,” Gordon said. “Our staff had input into the design, and the thinking behind every decision was, ‘What can we do to improve instruction and learning?’ It’s just a wonderful space. We got everything I hoped for.”

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Skokie School District 73½
8000 East Prairie Road
Skokie, Illinois 60076

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Written, designed and produced by Complete Communications, Inc., Skokie, Illinois

'Music Man' fits McCracken to a 'T'

McCracken School presented its annual student musical the weekend before Thanksgiving, and the production brought audiences to their feet. The cast of 47 students from grades 6-8 delivered matinee and evening performances of the Broadway musical "The Music Man Jr." on Nov. 16 and 17. They were supported by a crew of 20 students who ran the lights, music, props and scene changes.

"The performances went wonderfully!" said Amy Keipert, a music teacher and director of choirs at McCracken. "The students brought a great deal of energy and heart to the stage. I was so proud of them!"

Keipert directed and choreographed the show. "I love 'The Music Man.' I've been in it twice on stage and music-directed it once, but this is my first time directing and choreographing it," Keipert said. "It's the perfect musical: the songs are all memorable, the characters have depth and substance, and the story is full of humor and heart."

Students started work during the first week of school. Initial auditions took place in small groups, followed by a round of call-



McCracken music teacher Amy Keipert praised her students' performance in what she calls "the perfect musical."

backs to make final decisions about who would play what role. "It's always a challenge because there are so many talented students," Keipert said. "It often comes down to how the actors interact with one another."

Rehearsals started on Sept. 5, two hours a day, three days a week for 10 weeks. The schedule intensified the week before the performances, when the cast and crew held tech rehearsals.

"The Music Man Jr." is a shortened version of the full-scale "Music Man" that uses pre-recorded instrumental music to ac-

company the singers and dancers. In the McCracken production, some students played multiple roles. "Our cast is fantastic," Keipert said. "The students in principal roles are all strong budding performers, and our ensemble players are full of energy."

McCracken social studies teacher Bethany Fagan was the producer and Stephanie Anderson, the drama teacher at Middleton, ran the tech crew. Fourteen parent committees were involved, and Keipert's mother, Carol, designed and created hundreds of costumes.

District 73½ guiding principles

- ◆ Our schools will support and inspire our students
- ◆ Our students will be critical thinkers and creative problem solvers
- ◆ Our community will demonstrate integrity and respect
- ◆ Our graduates will help make the world a better place