

Community Digest

Building a foundation for learning, leadership and life

Fall 2019



Dates to remember

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

Nov. 5—Teacher institute day. No school.

Nov. 14—4th and 5th grade music concert, 7 p.m., McCracken Middle School, 8000 East Prairie Rd.

Nov. 22—McCracken musical, 7 p.m., McCracken.

Nov. 23—McCracken musical, 2 p.m. and 7 p.m., McCracken.

Nov. 27-29—Thanksgiving break. No school.

Dec. 5—2nd and 3rd grade music concert, 7 p.m., McCracken.

Dec. 12—1st grade music concert, 6 p.m., Middleton School, 8300 N. St. Louis Ave.

Dec. 17—McCracken winter concert, 7 p.m., Niles North High School, 9800 Lawler Ave.

Dec. 23—First day of winter break.

Jan. 6, 2020—School resumes.

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.

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Members of the McCracken Social Justice Club work visited Meyer School last year during the World Read Aloud Outreach. Club members read diverse and inclusive picture books to the classes and afterward the Meyer students demonstrated what they were working on in class that day.

District plans equity review

The District 73½ school community has long celebrated the ethnic and racial diversity of its students and families. This year, officials are undertaking a rigorous self-examination to determine whether, aside from acknowledging diversity as a good thing, the district does enough to ensure that its students, staff and families have what they need to thrive.

The district has committed to a process called an equity audit. Led by an equity leadership team made up of teachers, support staff and administrators, and aided by an outside consultant, the audit will examine the district's curriculum, policies and practices to see whether they comprise an equitable school system.

According to the Illinois Association of

School Boards (IASB), "Educational equity means that every student has access to the educational resources and rigor they need at the right moment in their education regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, sexual orientation, family background, and/or family income."

The equity leadership team seeks to learn how those words play out in the day-to-day life of a school and district. "Educational equity is the concept that each member of the school community is getting whatever they need to achieve their full potential and have success both academically and emotionally," said Tori Gammeri, learning center director at McCracken Middle School and a member of the team.

Continued on next page

Schools add non-gendered bathrooms

As district leaders move forward with their efforts to ensure equitable treatment for all (*see story, page 1*), they've made a concrete change in that direction this year — the designation of a gender-neutral bathroom for students in each of the district's three buildings.

"It's a building issue that connects to equity. We have to think about every type of kid who may be here, or every type of family who may be here," said Supt. Kate Donegan. She said the move "gives all kids options to feel comfortable and safe during school."

The effort began after mothers of two Middleton School students brought up the subject with school officials last year. One of the moms, Jeni Gentry, has a second grader who identifies as male and uses male pronouns, but chooses to dress in a feminine manner. The other, who asked not to be named, has a 10-year-old who is "gender nonconforming" and prefers they/their/them as identifying pronouns.

Making the change this year was important because neither child was completely comfortable with the conventional gender-based designation for bathrooms.

"We didn't exactly 'advocate,' but we met with Kate and got a great response," Gentry said.

"I didn't feel like I was having a fight at all," said the other mother. "It's simply that there's so much change going on that there was some catching up to do."

Both parents praise teachers and classmates for honoring their children's wishes and treating them respectfully. "We haven't had any bad experiences about it," said the mother of the 10-year-old. "I do hope kids can try on different hats and can explore different feelings. Childhood is definitely a time of exploration," Gentry agreed. "Everybody at school knows about this already. I don't expect a problem."

In fact, she happily cited an incident during which a substitute teacher was uncertain about how to handle her son, Lewis, who likes to be called "LewLew." "His classmates jumped right in and helped explain the situation to her," she said.

She's proud of the fact that Lewis is navigating the world in his own way. For example, with his older sister, he devised a response to kids who challenge his way of dressing. "He says, 'These are not *girls'* clothes. They're *my* clothes."

Equity review

Continued from page 1

"In a diverse district such as ours, this also means that we need to pay close attention to ensuring that nobody has any disadvantage based on differences like race, religion, sexual orientation, ability, or any other aspect of their culture. There should be no bias in our curriculum and instructional methods and a strong focus on inclusion and representation for those who might feel marginalized."

The pursuit of equity in schools has occupied Dr. Ivette Dubiel, the district's equity consultant, for much of her career. Dubiel is Executive Director of Equity and Center for Professional Learning for the DuPage Regional Office of Education. Before that, she was the director of educational equity for Indian Prairie School District, the fourth largest school district in Illinois. Prior to that, she was assistant director of special programs for Community Unit School District 308. She founded and continues to lead the Illinois Coalition of Educational Equity Leaders.

Every part of society has elements of inequity, Dubiel said, citing law enforcement, housing and employment as examples. She described the audit as "a fact-finding process that allows the district to identify gaps in systemic policies and pro-



Social Justice Club members took this photo to represent their diversity.

cedures — what is working well, what are areas of needed improvement. The goal is to offer recommendations that address those areas."

She views the quest for equity as essential. "Education equity should be for all students, and should be seen and evident in curriculum, resources, activities and more," she said.

Dubiel noted that education is "a people business," and how well stakeholders in schools interact is key. "Teachers have to build relationships with students, not just be masters of content," she said.

Others on the equity leadership team agree. Martin Heffner, McCracken dean of students, and Concetta Rebecca, an in-

structional coach, described the importance of relationships this way: "It is important to create a community where our staff feels supported and can fully support our students by building positive and inclusive relationships. Students are always the priority when talking about equity in education, but we feel that teachers and students work so closely together it is important that the staff feel part of our school community regardless of gender identity, ethnic origin or family background, and sexual orientation."

Dubiel said the audit will include a review of district and school policies, and student data. Members of the school community will participate in focus groups later this year, and the results will be part of the audit analysis. She expects to submit a report with recommendations in the spring.

Gammeri described the hoped-for result this way: "We want every student, parent and staff member to feel valued and seen. We want everyone to have what they individually need to succeed — and we recognize that this is different than equality, where everyone would get the exact same resources. Being a more equitable environment would result in increases in both academic and social emotional success for each and every student, regardless of their differences."

Four join admin team

Four new administrators joined the District 73½ staff for the 2019-20 school year, all filling vacant positions.

Michael Golonka is the new director of buildings and grounds. A West Side Chicago native, he most recently headed the buildings and grounds department for the Northern Suburban Special Education District (NS-SED). Before that, he worked in buildings and grounds in Aurora and north suburban Catholic schools.



Michael Golonka

"Everything is going great. I've settled into the position and have gotten to know my team," Golonka said. "We are currently getting ready for the fall and winter seasons."

He has been married for 36 years to his wife, Geryl, and they have one daughter, Shelby, a graduate student at North Carolina State University.

Constantine (Dean) Pappas is director of student services. He comes to the district from Orland School District 135, where he was coordinator of special education services. Prior to that, he was a school psychologist at Orland.

"Skokie School District 73½ serves an incredibly diverse community, celebrates differences and strives to provide equitable opportunities for learners," he said. "It has been an extremely rewarding experience so far, and I look forward to continue building relationships with the staff, students and families."

Pappas and his wife Alyssa have a 1-year-old son, Leo.

Anthony Ruelli, the new chief financial officer, comes to the district from similar posts in Glen Ellyn School District 41 and Morton Grove School District 70.

"What attracted me to District 73½ was the amazing reputation it has. The administration, staff, students, and community all sparked my interest in applying," he said. "In addition, I used to work at the district as a seasonal custodian throughout college, so this district has a special place in my heart."

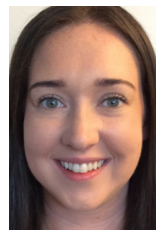
Dr. Helen Wei, new principal of Meyer School, also has a district connection. She grew up in Skokie, attended district schools, and her parents still live near Middleton School.

Before coming to Meyer, she taught curriculum and instruction at Concordia University Chicago, and had been curriculum director in Oak Park Elementary School District 97. She earned her bachelor's degree from Washington University in St. Louis, her master's from Harvard University, and her doctorate from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

"I really missed being around students and teachers every day," she said in explaining why she left her college teaching role. "I'm impressed with the community and staff here, the close-knit feeling. Everyone has been so welcoming and helpful. I'm very happy to find a very diverse community here."



Nikki Barnold



Aisling Eccles



Beth Glaser



Sarah Hampton



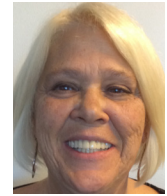
Laura Hernandez



Kelly Hutchins



Louis Kotvis



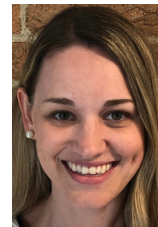
Lorraine Lewandowski



Wendy Maa



Hannah Saibert



Kathleen Schieber



Thi Truc Chau Tan

Welcome, new staff!

Nikki Barnold is a first-grade teacher at Middleton.

Aisling Eccles is a seventh-grade ELA teacher at McCracken.

Beth Glaser is library media specialist at Middleton.

Sarah Hampton is a fourth-grade teacher at Middleton.

Laura Hernandez is an instructional assistant in special education at Middleton.

Kelly Hutchins is the special education/district secretary in the district office.

Louis Kotvis is a full-time instructional coach at Middleton.

Lorraine Lewandowski is the payroll and benefits coordinator in the business office.

Wendy Maa is a second-grade teacher at Middleton.

Hannah Saibert is a full-time preschool teacher at Meyer.

Kathleen Schieber is a fifth-grade teacher at Middleton.

Thi Truc Chau Tan is a full-time special education instruc-

tional assistant at Middleton.

A y e s h a Yousuf is an instructional assistant at McCracken.



Ayesha Yousuf

Ileana Otilia Calin moves from part-time recess supervisor at Middleton to full-time instructional assistant at Middleton.

Lynn Catanus moves from seventh-grade ELA teacher to eighth-grade social studies teacher at McCracken.

Fil Dudic moves from 80-percent-time to full-time STE(A)M teacher and district STE(A)M leader at McCracken.

Tim Peng moves from full-time instructional assistant at Middleton to part-time IA and part-time certified PE teacher at Middleton.

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Board resolution outlines ‘safe zone’ for students

The District 73½ school board made clear this summer that all district students and families are to be treated fairly regardless of where they may come from.

The board passed a resolution in August prohibiting any district employee, contractor, volunteer or representative from inquiring about the immigration status of any student or parent. It further stated, “All District schools shall be inclusive places for District students and their families, and the District will not tolerate discrimination, harassment, or bullying,” adding, “No District student shall be denied equal access to any services or educational or extracurricular opportunities on the basis of the student’s immigration status.”

The resolution, modeled after similar “Safe Zones” resolutions passed by other U.S. school districts, was inspired by the advocacy of two district parents, Ashley Moy-Wooten and Daphnee Camilien. Moy-Wooten is a former organizer for the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant Refugee Rights (ICIRR), and Camilien is an immigration attorney.

The two, who met when their children attended Meyer School, got involved because of their familiarity with the increasingly contentious immigration issue.

“When there were several false sightings of ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) in Skokie, we decided one proactive and positive thing that we could do in this moment of fear and very hostile and punitive immigration enforcement was to do some simple education on the issue with our school board and administration and propose a ‘Safe Zones’ resolution,” Moy-Wooten said.

The District 73½ resolution and others like it “are designed

to ensure that all students come school feeling safe and ready to learn regardless of immigration status,” Moy-Wooten said. “They contain reassurances for students, procedures for responding to law enforcement, and information and support for families and staff.”

It is not known how many district households have immigration status in question for one or more members. But Skokie has been home to a sizable immigrant population for many years, and Moy-Wooten said at least one study has shown that more than 300,000 people in Cook County are “out of status.” She argued that because Congress has failed to pass comprehensive immigration reform, many immigrants live with uncertainty, or worse.

“There are many more people affected by this issue than you probably realize,” Moy-Wooten said. “The fear is palpable and trauma is compounded by simply watching or listening to the news these days.”

Both advocates say friends and neighbors can help by challenging the “stigma, fear and shame that comes along with being an immigrant.” Moy-Wooten argued, “As community members, educators, and fellow parents we can work together to ensure that our communities welcome all people and that we value our country as a land of immigrants.”

While the national immigration debate continues, she said, “schools are simply ensuring that all children get an education.” And Supt. Kate Donegan noted, “District 73½ strives to be a welcoming place for all of our students, families, and staff. The resolution and training are just two examples of how staff work together on behalf of all students and families.”

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