

# Community Digest

Building a foundation for learning, leadership and life

Fall 2020



Dates to  
remember

See <https://www.sd735.org> for up-to-date information about plans for reopening schools. See <https://www.sd735.org/calendar> for all events.

**Nov. 3**—Election Day, district closed.

**Nov. 25**—Thanksgiving break begins.

**Nov. 30**—School resumes.

**Dec. 21**—Winter break begins.

**Jan. 4, 2021**—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. Meetings also are live-streamed via YouTube with links posted in advance at the district web site. Public comments emailed to [contactboe@sd735.org](mailto:contactboe@sd735.org) will be made part of the public record.

Skokie School District 73½  
8000 East Prairie Rd.  
Skokie, IL 60076  
[www.sd735.org](http://www.sd735.org)  
[digest@sd735.org](mailto:digest@sd735.org)  
847-324-0509



In her Meyer School classroom, kindergarten teacher Abra Siegler works remotely with her young students.

## Despite virus, teachers and students get off to a good start

As District 73½ plans for students to come back to their schools — possibly before the end of 2020 — it's clear that a summer of planning laid the ground work for that return.

While the spread of the virus continues to be hard to predict, school officials say the start of school has gone as well as could be expected, and planning continues for at least a partial return to in-school instruction.

To prepare for the new school year, the district convened two planning committees: the Academics Committee, which examined what instruction would look like, and the Operations Committee, which looked at cleaning, health protocols, schedules and other logistical items. The two committees came together in August with a Return to Learn plan that called for remote instruction to start the year, with the goal of bringing students and teachers back later in the fall.

The Return to Learn plan was based on six

guiding principles: health and safety, engagement, social and emotional well-being, equity, professional development, and support and structure.

As a result, said Katie Hollenberg, a 2nd-grade teacher at Middleton School, there has been a significant contrast from the difficulties of spring, when the pandemic began.

"Teachers spent the summer reading, talking, planning and participating in professional development. We met weekly in committees and looked at schedules, programs and curriculum. We switched platforms from Google Meets to Zoom so we could do breakout rooms. We adopted new programs like Equip made by Engage New York Math to identify the possible holes from last year and to give us a plan to address those learning needs. We have looked at the curriculum and streamlined it. We quickly changed everything we have ever done and made it work

*Continued on next page*

## Good start

*Continued from page 1*

for our students.”

Remote learning has now become a more defined, structured program with a more detailed full-day schedule that includes synchronous (live) and asynchronous (independent) learning for all students. “We are receiving positive feedback from the community that this is much more engaging for students and our overall attendance in the online classrooms has improved considerably,” said Erica Berger, principal at Middleton.

“This year it is quite different because I am seeing my students every day over Zoom. This has allowed me the gift of being a responsive teacher. When I see that a student is struggling, I can easily intervene,” said 6th-grade math teacher Brittany Granquist. While remote learning has made it harder to build relationships with new students, it is still possible to do so, she added.

Students can follow a routine and see their teachers and peers every day through live learning sessions. Eighth grade science teacher Cathy Gormley said, “I have been able to use the various tools available over Zoom so that my students can still work together in groups and I can still instruct and manage small groups. The students are engaged and participating and even though we aren’t in the physical classroom, I am still able to connect with my students each day in the breakout rooms and through the Zoom chat and email.

“Something I did that students really enjoyed was ‘Chemistry in the Kitchen,’ where I demonstrated chemical reactions while my students were able to observe, ask questions and collect real data. This was really engaging for the students and it was a lot of fun!”

Granquist noted that McCracken Middle School has taken extra efforts to create and implement social emotional learning (SEL) curriculum and supports for all students. In addition to the Second Step curriculum already in place, social workers and administrators collaborated on lessons to be administered during longer advisory periods. “This certainly helps. Dedicating time to SEL teaching and learning is so important in a world without a pandemic, but it is extra important now.”

No one is saying that remote learning for an extended period is easy or desirable. Teaching children in kindergarten presents

different challenges than teaching eighth-graders, but teachers and administrators agree that the challenges are amplified when teachers and students are unable to be together in a classroom.

“Last year we had no time to prepare and everyone was just trying to get by, not knowing how long we’d be out of school,” said Abra Siegler, a kindergarten teacher at Meyer School. “This year we were able to take the time to re-prioritize our standards, convert a lot of lessons to be digital, prepare materials to go home with the students, etc.”

“Our teachers have really stepped up and are being very professional with their instruction,” said interim Supt. John Correll. “That being said, we know it is harder for the younger students, at-risk students, and others who may be new to the district. We cannot wait until we have our students and teachers back in school.”

“We are very thankful for the support of our parents, guardians, and caretakers, who provide a lot of support to our youngest learners,” said Meyer principal Helen Wei.

Berger noted, “I think the biggest obstacle is that we are often feeling like things are tentative. With positivity rates rising and falling in the state and guidance from [federal and state officials] constantly changing, it is hard to have a clear timeline. However, with the various teams and the development of a Reopen Task Force, we are preparing ourselves for the reopening and ensuring our

students and staff are in a safe learning environment. No matter what happens, student safety is our top priority.”

Granquist has seen some positive outcomes during the period of remote learning. Over 10 years of teaching middle-schoolers, she said, she has seen countless students struggle to ask for help or clarification from both peers and teachers. She said, “I am seeing the development of self-advocacy skills more now than ever before. Students are managing their time, navigating emails and speaking up when they need support. That is the silver lining in all of this.”

Hollenberg said, “All teachers want to be back in our classrooms with our students. We miss them and miss being with them. That has been the hardest thing for teachers. That is the huge minus. One plus is that, for my age group, I feel like I get to know my students on a different level. I have met gerbils and other beloved pets, seen backyards, and watched students roller skate. These are all things I haven’t been able to see before and it helps me know them as a whole child.

“Another plus is that we have been able to improve the home-school connection. I feel like parents get a little glimpse into the ‘classrooms’ of all of the amazing teachers we have and the incredible things their children are learning through the screen. I have always felt that the parents of this district were incredibly supportive, but the support I feel now from parents is off the charts.”

## Superintendent search continues

District officials say the search for a new superintendent is on track and expected to be completed by the end of 2020.

Dr. John Correll and Ellen Correll are sharing the job of leading the district on an interim basis for the 2020-21 school year, following Kate Donegan’s exit at the end of June.

Board President Nicholas Werth said applications for the position will close this month. The board expects to interview candidates in November, and announce the new superintendent in December.

The board is employing an executive search firm, B.W.P. & Associates, to assist with searches both for the interim leaders and the permanent superintendent. Mark Friedman, B.W.P.’s president, said the firm is gathering input from community stake-

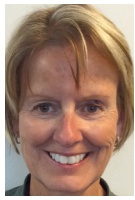
holders on what qualities they want the new leader to possess. That research has included focus group meetings with parents and community members; sessions with teachers, administrators and support staff; and an online community survey that received more than 100 responses.

Friedman said the board’s direction was to seek “someone who is committed to equity, someone who is a good communicator.” He said an understanding of the district’s population diversity was also a priority.

The search process also includes assessing candidates for the district’s Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment. Dr. Dawn Green holds the position now on an interim basis. Friedman said the new superintendent, once named, will choose Dr. Green’s successor.



John Correll



Ellen Correll



Dawn Green



LaTonya Wilks



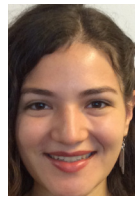
Erica Berger



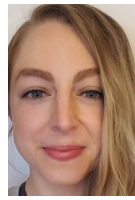
Priya Amin



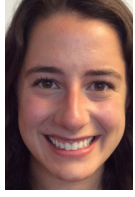
Peadar Hurley



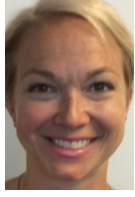
Sally Alvarado



Carley Benrus



Moriah Berry



Iida Borges



Felicia Brown



Kaleb Carter



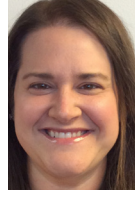
Keryl Carter



Carolyn Castellini



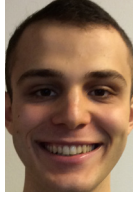
Jennifer Conn



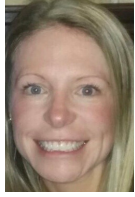
Jody Ehrenberg



Kirsten Frankel



Brandon Karoff



Sarah Kinsella



Katelin Magnuson



Lisa Repp



Victoria Salas



Najiba Samuel



Kelly Walbert



Jenny Walsh



Debbie Zhou

# New leaders, teachers, specialists join staff

District 73½ welcomes new staff members for the 2020-21 school year, including several new administrators.

Following the departure of Supt. Kate Donegan in June, the school board hired a husband-and-wife team of retired administrators, **Dr. John Correll** and **Ellen Correll**, to fill the superintendent's position on an interim basis. Earlier in his career, John Correll was superintendent for the Salt Creek School District 48 in Oak Brook, and Ellen Correll was superintendent for Grayslake School District 46.

The board also tapped **Dr. Dawn Green** as interim Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment following the departure of Becky Mathison. Green came from LaGrange School District 105, where she was interim superintendent. She served before that as superintendent/curriculum director in Palos Heights and Somonauk.

**Dr. LaTonya Wilks** is the new director of student services. Before coming to District 73½, she worked in Chicago Public Schools as a special education teacher, counselor, and dean of students; at Crete Monee High School as intervention dean; and in District 111 as director of student support services. Having served as a special education teacher and through personal experience, she said, she has learned that all students can learn. She came to District 73½ because of its excellent reputation for academics. "Students are challenged to push themselves, and the district allows them to succeed," she said.

**Dr. Erica Berger** is the new principal at Middleton School. She has been assistant principal at Edison School in nearby District 69, and assistant principal and principal at Winkelman School in Glenview District 31. She was a classroom teacher for eight years, and has a doctorate in educational leadership from National Louis University.

"I started my career in Niles Township and I was eager to get back to my roots where it all began," Berger said. "I thrive on working in diverse communities and District 73½ is just that!"

**Priya Amin** is the new assistant principal at McCracken School. After 17 years as a social studies teacher working mostly with 9th graders, she believed that her classroom experience could inform her role as an

administrator. After working for the last eight years at Loyola Academy High School, she said, "I was looking to work in a smaller school environment with a strong sense of community, which made me feel like District 73½ was a good fit. I grew up in Skokie, and am currently a resident."

**Peadar Hurley** is the new director of buildings and grounds. A stationary engineer, he has worked for School District 80 in Norridge, Maine South High School in Park Ridge, and Walter Payton High School in Chicago. "I am enjoying the opportunity to work in such a wonderful and diverse school district," he said. "As an immigrant myself I enjoy learning from other cultures and nationalities."

\*\*\*

The other new staff members are:

- Sally Alvarado**, ELL teacher, Middleton and McCracken
- Carley Benrus**, 1st grade teacher, Middleton
- Moriah Berry**, social worker, McCracken
- Iida Borges**, PE teacher, Meyer
- Felicia Brown**, administrative assistant/scheduler, McCracken
- Kaleb Carter**, instructional assistant, McCracken
- Keryl Carter**, special education teacher, Middleton
- Carolyn Castellini**, art/music teacher, Meyer
- Jennifer Conn**, 3rd grade teacher, Middleton
- Jody Ehrenberg**, special education teacher, McCracken
- Kirsten Frankel**, speech/language pathologist, Meyer
- Brandon Karoff**, special education instructional assistant, Middleton
- Sarah Kinsella**, 4th and 5th grade Extended Learning Program teacher, Middleton
- Katelin Magnuson**, 7th grade English language arts teacher, McCracken
- Lisa Repp**, STEAM teacher, Middleton
- Victoria Salas**, 4th grade teacher, Middleton
- Najiba Samuel**, instructional assistant, McCracken
- Kelly Walbert**, 4th grade teacher, Middleton
- Jenny Walsh**, social worker, Middleton
- Debbie Zhou**, preschool special education teacher, Meyer

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

NON PROFIT  
ORG.  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Skokie, Illinois  
Permit No. 357

Carrier Route Pre-Sort

### Board of Education

Nicholas Werth, President  
Emily Twarog Miller, Vice President  
Kelli Nelson, Secretary  
Bushra Amiwala, Secretary Pro Tem  
Carla Arias  
Crystal Johnson  
John Wash

Dr. John Correll and Ellen Correll, Interim Superintendents

### Postal Patron

### Local

Skokie, IL 60076-9614

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

## Wash, Johnson step up to school board roles

The District 73½ board of education has welcomed two new members during the past eight months.

John Wash came on the board in March, when he stepped in to succeed Gary Dolinko. "I thought it would be a great opportunity to join the board and hopefully make an impact on decisions that would benefit the district for years to come," he said. "I joined the board during a somewhat chaotic time, so I just wanted to contribute in any way possible with the hope of regaining stability for our district."

Wash and his wife have lived in the district for five years. They have a daughter at Middleton and a son at McCracken.

He ran unsuccessfully for a board seat in 2019. He hopes to promote ideas he supported then. One is fiscal responsibility. Another is equity among the teaching staff: "There are people of color in many supporting roles in our district but very few classroom teachers."

"I also wanted to see more transparency between the school board and its stakeholders," he said. "No one person or committee should make decisions that affect so many without input from the community."

Crystal Johnson was appointed in August to succeed Scott Bramley, who resigned. She has two children who attend Middleton



John Wash

School and one at McCracken. Her family has lived in the district for seven years.

"My primary interest is serving our community and our children during this challenging time," she said. "I am fortunate to have worked with many schools throughout the

Chicago area over the past 15 years, so I felt like my background might provide a useful perspective." She is program director at the Wentcher Foundation, which provides college scholarships to students from Chicago Public Schools and Oakton Community College, and also was executive director and



Crystal Johnson

education director of the Chicago Metro History Education Center. She has degrees in secondary education and educational policy studies.

She hopes to focus on students most at risk of falling behind during the pandemic. She said, "I hope that I can ask thoughtful questions and suggest good ideas to help ensure that our most vulnerable children make

strong progress during this difficult time."

She added, "I believe that I share with my fellow board members a strong commitment to listening to our parents."

Neither Johnson nor Wash has decided whether to run for a full term in April 2021.

### Spring '21 election to decide four board seats

Four seats on the District 73½ Board of Education will be filled in the April 6, 2021, consolidated election. Candidates will run for four-year terms.

To run, a candidate must be at least 18 years old, a U.S. citizen, a registered voter and a resident of the district for at least one year. Candidates do not have to declare a political party affiliation. Visit <https://www.sd735.org/news/1688520/iasb-school-board-elections-info> for more information about running for the board.

The period for circulating nominating petitions began Sept. 22. Petitions must be filed with the Cook County Clerk's Office between Dec. 10 and Dec. 21.

Nominating petitions can be obtained in person from the Cook County Clerk's office at 5600 W. Old Orchard Road, Skokie (847-470-7233), or electronically from the County Clerk's office (<http://www.cookcountyclerkofcourt.org>) or the Illinois Board of Elections (<https://www.elections.il.gov/>).

Petitions and other election forms are *not* available from the District 73½ office.

### 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