

# Community Digest

Building a foundation for learning, leadership and life

Fall 2022



Dates to remember

See *The Weekly* (<https://www.sd735.org/newsletters>) for up-to-date district information.

**Strategic Plan Roundtable discussions are open to the public.** Please visit <https://www.sd735.org/strategic-planning/index> for information or to register in advance.

**Nov. 2**—Strategic Plan Roundtable discussion on acceleration of learning, 7-9 p.m., Meyer School, 8100 Tripp Ave.

**Nov. 9**—Strategic Plan Roundtable discussion on infrastructure and fiscal responsibility, 7-9 p.m., Meyer School.

**Nov. 16**—Strategic Plan Roundtable discussion on creating goals and strategies for initiatives, 7-9 p.m., Meyer School.

**Nov. 23-25**—Thanksgiving break. No school.

**Dec. 26**—Winter break begins.

**Jan. 9, 2023**—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.

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## Community outreach key to new strategic plan

As the current five-year strategic plan in District 73½ nears its end, school officials are designing a new guide for the next half-decade.

An important part of the whole process is to seek out community members for their thoughts. The district is aiming in particular to reach those who may not have participated before.

“I was part of the process five years ago,” said Board President Emily Twarog Miller. “I think we did a good job of getting lots of stakeholders in the room but it still wasn’t as representative as we would have liked in terms of fully representing the diverse population of our student body. We are working with our EL coordinator and building principals and staff to reach out more intentionally.”

Board Vice President Kelli Nelson wants to “encourage all stakeholders in our community to

participate. I feel I need to be a cheerleader for involvement, to explain why participation is essential. We want all voices to be heard.”

Shelby Cosner, a professor of education at the University of Illinois-Chicago, has been hired by the district to help guide the planning process. She said reaching “missing voices” is critical. “The district will need a variety of volunteers to go out into the community instead of having people come to a central place,” she said. “You want to take the engagement to them, rather than having them come to the district.”

Cosner said the first step in making a new plan is to review the existing one. District administrators presented the board with the results of their review at its September meeting (see box below).

“I think we had tremendous successes in the

*Continued on page 3*

## Analyzing plan progress so far

The district review of the current plan looked at progress in five areas:

**The Whole Child.** Accomplishments include exploring social and emotional learning (SEL) curricula, providing anti-bias training and information for members of the school community, offering opportunities for students to connect with peers, and establishing trauma and crisis training for community members. Work to be done includes expanding learning opportunities in the community, assessing the effectiveness of the SEL curriculum, and assessing programming aimed at teaching students about healthy choices.

**The Learning Environment.** Accomplishments include creating a digital citi-

zenship learning sequence for grades K-8, improving the look and furniture options in district schools, and hiring a consultant to assess building security. Work to be done includes addressing remaining furniture needs, piloting the digital citizenship sequence, and responding to recommendations from the security consultant.

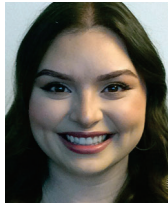
**Academics.** Accomplishments include offering STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and math) learning to all K-8 students, and refining the district’s standards-referenced grading practices. Work to be done includes a review by a committee of the District Equity Leadership Team (DELT) to support culturally and lingu-

*Continued on page 3*

# Welcome, new staff



*Kiran  
Adnan*



*Stefani  
Amick*



*Nahrain  
Behnam*



*Courtney  
Carlstrom*



*Katherine  
Chalmers*



*Emily  
Crook*



*Shawaye  
Desta*



*Reed  
Gettleman*



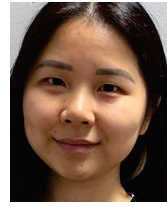
*Selina  
Haroon*



*Robert  
Henderson*



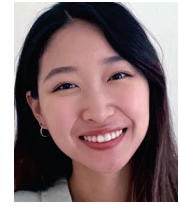
*Casey Josh  
Henson*



*Jenny  
Huynh*



*Una  
Ikanovic*



*Ashley  
Kang*

District 73½ welcomes the following new staff for the 2022-23 school year:

Kiran Adnan, Recess Supervisor, Middleton  
 Stefani Amick, Social Worker, Middleton  
 Nahrain Behnam, EL Teacher, Middleton  
 Courtney Carlstrom, 5th grade Teacher, Middleton  
 Katherine Chalmers, PE Teacher, Middleton  
 Emily Crook, Psychologist, McCracken  
 Shawaye Desta, Kindergarten Instructional Assistant, Meyer  
 Reed Gettleman, Special Education Teacher, McCracken  
 Selina Haroon, Preschool Instructional Assistant, Meyer  
 Robert Henderson, Learning Center Assistant, McCracken  
 Casey Josh Henson, Special Education Teacher, Middleton  
 Jenny Huynh, EL Kindergarten Teacher, Meyer  
 Una Ikanovic, EL/SPED Resource Teacher, Meyer  
 Ashley Kang, EL Teacher, McCracken  
 Jessica Kushner, Kindergarten Instructional Assistant, Meyer  
 Maryam Malik, Recess Supervisor, Middleton  
 Jenny Malone, 3rd Grade Teacher, Middleton  
 Richard McDonald, Chief Information Officer  
 Kendra Paraskevopoulos, EL Teacher, Middleton  
 Nathan Pratt, STEAM Teacher, Middleton  
 Syeda Quadri, Instructional Assistant, McCracken  
 Natalie Quiballo, Instructional Assistant, McCracken  
 Ayesha Riaz, 2nd Grade Teacher, Middleton  
 Sara Shapiro, Special Education Teacher, Middleton  
 Paulina Sidorkiewicz, Kindergarten Instructional Assistant, Meyer  
 Anajé Silva, 4th Grade Teacher, Middleton  
 Kayla Simon, Special Education Teacher, Middleton  
 Lisa Spector, Kindergarten Instructional Assistant, Meyer  
 Marryann Warda, Nurse, McCracken  
 David Waskin, Recess Supervisor, Middleton



*Jessica  
Kushner*



*Maryam  
Malik*



*Jenny  
Malone*



*Richard  
McDonald*



*Kendra  
Paraskevopoulos*



*Nathan  
Pratt*



*Syeda  
Quadri*



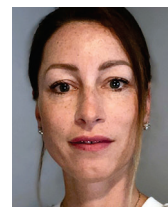
*Natalie  
Quiballo*



*Ayesha  
Riaz*



*Sara  
Shapiro*



*Paulina  
Sidorkiewicz*



*Anajé  
Silva*



*Kayla  
Simon*



*Lisa  
Spector*



*Marryann  
Warda*



*David  
Waskin*

# Longtime staff members earn recognition

Two teachers have reached their 25th year with the district in 2022.

Annie Monak, a full-time instructional coach, has played a number of roles during her tenure. She started as a substitute in 6th grade, then taught language arts and social studies to 7th and 8th graders. Along the way, she mastered technology skills, running McCracken School's original Tech Lab for a time, then teaching computer and media labs in the McCracken addition.

As the district migrated to providing computer devices to all students, Monak evolved again into her coaching role. It's a role she relishes. "It's so great to be in a small district that's a tight-knit community that people absolutely love," she said.

She particularly appreciates her colleagues. "I get to see teachers from all grade levels and to see their passion for teaching," she said.

Unlike Monak, Carrie Eccleston is doing the same job she has done for more than two decades — teach 6th grade. Lessons, methods and settings have changed, but the human side of teaching hasn't.

"Sixth graders are still the same, and I just love when they come in as 5th graders, excited and terrified," she said. "Then I get to see them really sprout those wings by the end of the year."

Eccleston works each year to adapt and improve instructional units, spending summers honing her skills and seeking ways to ap-

peal to her students and take advantage of their comfort with technology. As mother to two teenagers, she also brings life lessons to her classrooms. "I have that parent perspective as well as the teacher perspective," she said.

It's the students who keep her engaged, she said. "I love being around kids, even when they're grumpy. It's the joy they have when they learn something, understand something."

\* \* \*

Pandemic issues kept two other staff members who passed the 25-year mark from being recognized.

Alvin Carter, Meyer School custodian and driver of the kindergarten bus, reached 25 years in 2019. "Mr. Alvin takes great pride in his work, and his favorite part of his job is interacting with our students," said Meyer Principal Helen Wei.

Chip De Stefano, band director, reached 25 years in 2021. Director of bands at McCracken Middle School since 1996, he is active nationally as a clinician, guest conductor and adjudicator. He has written and co-authored several books and his own music has been published. "Under his leadership, our band program has earned an impressive list of amazing accomplishments and accolades at the local and state level," said McCracken Principal Nancy Ariola.

## New plan

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last plan," Nelson said. "There was a clear signal to increase STEM instruction and the plan did that well. The work around whole child, family and community also did well."

This time around, Cosner said the plan should reflect a thorough examination of the district's current situation, buttressed by data and community input as much as possible. It requires deep thinking and lots of discussion. "The district has to identify areas that are worthy of strategic investment," she said. "You're not working on everything all at once."

To that end, Miller said four target areas have emerged from the work done so far: welcoming, acceleration of learning, hiring and retention, and finance and infrastructure. She acknowledges that those areas are broad, but added, "the most important thing to remember is that all of the work we do is focused on providing an excellent education to all of our students."

Nelson said the new plan must include ways to measure progress and to make that information broadly accessible. "How do we benchmark? How do we know if we're a quarter of the way there, or halfway there?" she said. "And for people who don't understand educational jargon, how will they know? The plan needs to be understandable,

## Analyzing progress

*Continued from front page*

tically relevant instruction, and providing professional development for teachers on inquiry-based learning and student goal-setting.

**Fiscal Responsibility.** Accomplishments include creating a finance committee with community representation and monthly public meetings, presenting monthly budget updates to the board, resolving most of the high-priority issues identified in the district's most recent 10-year life-safety analysis, and seeking grants. Work to be done includes creating a long-range facility plan, updating the business office manual, attending meetings of the Illinois Association of School Business Officials (IASBO), attending meetings of ED-RED (a group of north suburban school districts), and collaborating with business offi-

clearly measurable, and be able to accept feedback on progress toward goals."

With data gathering and input-seeking underway, school officials are planning for a rough draft in early 2023, with an expectation that the plan will be complete by the end of the school year. The mere act of creating the plan benefits all those in the district.

cial in Niles Township on cost-sharing.

**Community Engagement.** Accomplishments include forming relationships with local colleges and Niles North High School to host student teachers and improve hiring practices, allowing McCracken students to tutor Middleton students to encourage them to consider teaching careers, and increasing communication with families who speak languages other than English using Language Ambassadors and partnering with the Niles Township ELL Parent Center. Work to be done includes seeking student teachers from colleges with more diverse student populations, using technology to improve connections between school and home, and having the DELT host community roundtables with district staff and community members to analyze the equity of district policy and systems.

"A plan is about uniting a community to move forward. It's aspirational," she said. "It allows stakeholders to talk about what they really care about, their hopes and dreams."

To that end, Nelson wants all district residents to know "that we are partners in the success of the district. We want them to be involved and included."

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**Skokie School District 73½**  
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## School board appoints two new members

The District 73½ school board has appointed two new members to fill vacancies. Each will be eligible to run for election in April.

Louis Mercer, a social studies teacher at North Shore Country Day School in Winnetka, has lived in the district since 2017 and has two children attending Middleton School. He is also a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Illinois-Chicago. He believes his teaching experience has prepared him to make valuable contributions to the board.

"I teach my students to analyze historical perspectives, identify multiple perspectives, and to look for more voices to help understand complexity," he said. "Critical thinking and considering multiple perspectives are central to the work of a board member."

Mercer said equity, sustainability and expanding services for vulnerable students are the district's most important issues. "Our district has taken great strides toward our goal of creating a more equitable learning environment," he said. "We must find ways as a board to expand these opportunities."

He said he believes schools must provide the space and technology to support learning while also employing environmentally sustainable practices. He also plans to work with other local governments to bring needed support to families who need it.

LaTasha Nelson is a medical doctor and professor at Northwestern University. She and her husband have lived in the district

since 2010 and have a fifth-grader at Middleton and a freshman at Niles North.

She has been involved in district schools since her oldest child was in first grade, and said, "I am very excited by the recent changes and growth within the district."

Nelson added the district must ensure "that all kids have the opportunity to reach their full potential in a safe and nurturing environment. This is especially important as we exit COVID, a time when many of us felt isolated and unsafe."

She believes her work experience has helped prepare her for board service. "One

major similarity is having to do what is necessary, but not always what is popular."

Her volunteer experience in the district shaped her view of the board's role. Along with career-day appearances, fundraising and chaperoning, she sat on search committees for administrative positions. She noted, "This involvement definitely fueled my desire to become more involved."

She believes students should know their worth and "dream big." "All kids deserve to learn in this type of environment," she said. "Every decision that I make as a board member will be in an effort to achieve this goal."

## Farewell to three retirees

Three long-time staff members retired from the district last spring.

Meghan Rosenfeld concluded her 34-year run as a third-grade teacher. She had previously served as an EL teacher and also taught special education. "Meghan was respected by all and considered a leader in our building," said Middleton School Principal Nikki Tammaru. "She mentored our newer teachers and always put students first."

Sara Denaro taught eighth-grade English and Language Arts (ELA) at McCracken Middle School. She started at McCracken in 1994. "Ms. Denaro served as a respected colleague and leader during her time as an educator, serving as a grade-level team leader and participating in numerous building and district-wide committees," said McCracken Principal Nancy Ariola.

Mary Madigan was school nurse at McCracken for 23 years and also served as lead nurse in the district, providing leadership to the nursing staff across all three schools. "She provided comfort, care and compassion on a daily basis and her presence will be missed dearly," Ariola said. "She endured many challenges during the ongoing pandemic and always provided high-quality care and leadership."

## 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