

# School District 29

## BOARD OF EDUCATION REPORT

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www.sunsetridge29.net

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April 2008



Dr. Linda Vieth

### Dear District 29 Community Members,

Thank you to everyone who participated in our district's recent Continuous Improvement survey! The survey has provided us with a wealth of information on a variety of important topics. While we are extremely pleased with the overall positive response and high levels of satisfaction, we are taking your constructive suggestions and comments very seriously. (Please refer to the article at right for additional information about the survey report.) We have already begun to follow up on specific topics in the survey that require further attention. We recognize that we can always get better; our goal is to make our schools the very best they can be!

In keeping with this goal, we are utilizing the survey data, along with the principles espoused by Jim Collins in **Good to Great**, as the basis for our current strategic planning. Strategic planning is a collaborative process which results in a long-range plan for the District. Our Strategic Planning Team consists of teachers, administrators, Board of Education members, parents, and community members. Because I wanted to be an active participant during the process, I asked Dr. Joseph Porto, Superintendent of Avoca School District 37, to facilitate our sessions. Dr. Porto has facilitated strategic planning on several occasions in the past. As the superintendent of a neighboring district that also sends its students to New Trier, Dr. Porto is bringing an insight and understanding to our process that no other facilitator would have been able to provide.

During our first session on April 9, team  
Please see **VIETH**, page 6

### Survey Report Reflects High Approval: Results Already in Use to Improve Learning

Earlier this year District 29 contracted with School Perceptions, LLC, to assist in the preparation and analysis of a district-wide survey. School Perceptions has worked with hundreds of school districts throughout the country and is regarded as one of the nation's leading experts on gathering and analyzing public perceptions regarding schools. At the March meeting of the Sunset Ridge Board of Education, Bill Foster of School Perceptions presented his report on the District 29 Continuous Improvement Survey. The survey was administered in February. The report contains quantitative data on various topics, including curriculum and instruction, programs, personnel, technology, facilities, finances, and students' physical, social and emotional well-being. Several common themes, based on their frequency within the written comment sections, are also identified in the report.

Individualized surveys were designed for students, Sunset Ridge graduates, parents, non-parent community members and school staff. In all, 577 people responded to the survey, including 139 community members (9%), 123 parents (37%), 234 students and 81 staff (77%). The number of respondents is high enough to provide an acceptable level of accuracy within the different subgroups.

"We are grateful to everyone who completed the survey," noted Superintendent Linda Vieth. "We truly value your thoughts and comments."

Please see **SURVEY**, page 4

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*To view the entire Continuous Improvement Survey Report please go to the District website: [www.sunsetridge29.net](http://www.sunsetridge29.net)*

## Explorers' Club Lets First Graders Direct Their Own Learning



One of the most exciting parts of the first grade curriculum is a month long unit called Explorers' Club. The unit provides an opportunity for the children to research and explore a subject of their own choosing. The students begin by brainstorming topics of interest and then listing their top three choices. Each child is placed in a small group of five or six children to study one of their favored topics. The groups, which intermix students from all three first grade classes, are taught by various members of the faculty.

During the first part of Explorers' Club the children gather information from books, videos, CD-ROMs, websites and field trips. The next phase of

*Dr. Brian Donahue read a book about the human body to students who visited his office while exploring that topic.*

the unit involves hands-on preparation of models, demonstrations or posters to present their new knowledge to others. The activity culminates with the Explorers' Club Museum, which garnered rave reviews from parents on first grade Portfolio Night.

Explorers' Club is always hailed by many students as one of the highlights of first grade. "One of the best aspects of the Explorers' Club, from the children's perspective, is that they get to study a topic of their choice, thus directing their own learning," noted first grade teacher Pam Kennedy. "Another plus is being able to widen their circle of friends by learning with children from the other first grade classes and becoming familiar with faculty that may be new to them. It goes without saying that faculty members enjoy sharing a special interest with a small, like-minded group of children, too!"

## Bicycle Champion, Principal Go to Extremes to Promote Safety, Determination

Matt Wilhelm chose a unique response to being bullied: he learned such amazing tricks on a BMX bicycle that he could literally ride circles (and twists and jumps) around the bullies. An X-Games and World Championship rider, Matt demonstrated his skills to Middlefork students during an assembly coinciding with the third grade bicycle safety unit. In addition to explaining and demonstrating safety precautions, Mr. Wilhelm imparted a message emphasizing the power of determination and a "can do" attitude. At right: In keeping with her philosophy of education, Dr. Mary Frances Greene, Middlefork Principal, (lying down) demonstrated her own willingness to go to extremes. "We'll do anything for the sake of the children!" she explained.



## Eighth Grade "Lock-In" Culminates Fundraising Activities



Sunset Ridge eighth graders participated in a Friday night lock-in during late February as the finale to the annual fundraising drive for their class gift. The students raised funds through a raffle for an I-pod and will vote in the spring to determine their class gift.

Besides having fun and staying up all night at the school, the students devoted a portion of their evening to making puppy chow and rice krispy treats to put in goodie bags for children of families who are customers of the Good News Soup Kitchen in Chicago. This is the 2nd year in a row that this class has organized an effort to help the Good News Soup Kitchen.

### WEBSITE UPDATE

DISTRICT 29 HAS RETAINED THE SCHOOLWIRES DESIGN TEAM TO WORK WITH THE WEBSITE COMMITTEE AND TECHNOLOGY STAFF IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW WEBSITE.

THE COMMITTEE HAS IDENTIFIED AND PRIORITIZED KEY ELEMENTS FOR THE WEBSITE AND IS CURRENTLY TESTING DIFFERENT COMPONENTS AND WAYS OF CATEGORIZING CONTENT AREAS. OVER THE NEXT SEVERAL MONTHS SCHOOLWIRES WILL PRESENT IDEAS FOR A CUSTOMIZED WEB DESIGN THAT REFLECTS THESE PRIORITIES AND THE WEB-BASED NEEDS OF STUDENTS, STAFF AND PARENTS. "WE WILL BE WORKING WITH A VARIETY OF STAKEHOLDERS WHILE THE DESIGN PROCESS IS UNDERWAY TO BE SURE WE CONNECT WITH OUR AUDIENCE AND CAPTURE THE SPIRIT OF OUR SCHOOLS," EXPLAINED CHARLENE ENTMAN, TEACHER TECHNOLOGY FACILITATOR. COMMENTS OR SUGGESTIONS REGARDING THE NEW WEB SITE CAN BE SENT BY EMAIL TO MRS. ENTMAN AT ENTMANC@SUNSETRIDGE29.NET.



Dressed in pajamas along with her students, third grade teacher Karen Byrnes enjoyed the fourth annual Middlefork Pajama Day and Readathon held during National Reading Month. Students listened to a storyteller in the morning and were served "breakfast for lunch." The entire school gathered to share books with their reading buddies in the afternoon.

SURVEY, continued from page 1

### Overall Satisfaction is High

The overall level of satisfaction reflected in the survey was very high. Ninety-five percent or more of community, parent and staff groups “agreed” or “strongly agreed” they are satisfied with the education students receive in District 29. Ninety-seven percent said they would recommend the District to a friend moving into the area. Ninety-nine percent of parents and 86% of community members were satisfied with the financial management of the District.

Among the themes Mr. Foster identified were a desire for improvement in report cards and notification of student difficulties, the band program, implementation of technology, beginning foreign language at an earlier age, academic stress, and standardized testing. Many respondents encouraged the District to make air-conditioning a priority. Comments also indicated that in general, respondents really like the entire staff of the Sunset Ridge School District.

“Although there were many comments challenging the District to improve, overall people rated the Sunset Ridge School District more positively than in any other district I have ever worked with, and I have worked with a lot of school districts!” Mr. Foster noted.

The Board of Education is extremely pleased by the confidence in District 29 reflected in the survey. Peter Fischer, board president, stated, “From the perspective of a member of the school board we were pleased that so many members of the community took part in the survey. We are also extremely gratified that so many respondents gave high marks to our schools in so many areas. In general, “customer satisfaction” seems to be quite high.

“That being said,” Mr. Fischer continued, “the report does give us real feedback on specific areas that need improvement or study. It is safe to say that none of these areas came as a complete surprise or shock, but it is very helpful to have more specific information about community perceptions. We will begin immediately to review the problem areas and we will also be able to incorporate the findings of the survey into the strategic planning process which we began this month.”

Dr. Vieth was pleased that the community recognizes the hard work of the staff and has acknowledged the strength of the academic program. “Nonetheless, the District has already begun ‘drilling down’ into the data in an attempt to further analyze and fully understand the opinions expressed by respondents,” she noted. “In addition to strategic planning, survey data will be utilized in future curriculum and program reviews as we continuously look for ways to improve and strive to make our students’ learning experience the very best it can be.”



The Internet brings to students a universe of experiences to which they could not otherwise be exposed. In District 29 it supplements but does not supplant hands-on learning. Left: Students in the seventh grade service learning class experienced the personal rewards of giving back to others when they served a holiday meal at the North Shore Senior Center. Right: Fifth graders learned what it would be like to travel by covered wagon at the Naperville Settlement.





## Green Committee Launches Initiatives

The students, teachers and parents comprising the Green Committee are committed to creating a greener community, one step at a time. During March and April the committee launched three initiatives to help protect the environment:

- **No Idling**—Drivers in the Sunset Ridge and Middlefork parking lots and pick-up lanes are being encouraged to shut off car engines if idling for more than 30 seconds. Car exhaust is detrimental to health, air quality, and vehicles, and wastes fuel. Letters explaining the initiative were sent to all families in March.

- **Reusable Grocery Bags**—The committee and District students are selling two styles of reusable grocery bags in an effort to reduce the use of plastic and paper bags. For each bag sold, \$2 will go toward District and committee environmental programs. Order forms are available in the school offices and on the District website.

- **Litterless Lunch**—In March, student members of the committee conducted an unannounced garbage weigh-in during all lunch periods at Sunset Ridge. After disposing of beverages and recyclables, they weighed from 13-19 pounds of trash per grade. They will distribute information describing ways to reduce lunchtime waste to the rest of the student body and conduct future weigh-ins to measure their progress. "The student committee members already have a wealth of information about ways to make things more green," said faculty member Anita Victorn. "They are very aware."

## Hats Off To:



### Carol Broos, Sunset Ridge Music

- Mary Hoffman Award, Illinois Music Education Association
- Finalist, 2008 Golden Apple Award

### Mary Bortz, Sunset Ridge Art (retired) and Carol Broos, Sunset Ridge Music

- Larry Stilgebauer Award, Honorable Mention, Illinois Learning Technology Center

### Ken Smith, Director of Technology Integration and Enrichment Projects

- "Teaching Gifted Writers," *Gifted Child Today*, April, 2008

### Terri Zazove, Gifted/Enrichment Teacher

- Honor Roll, SENG (Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted)
- Presenter, SENG 25th Anniversary Conference, July, 2008

Presenters representing Sunset Ridge School District 29 at the Illinois Technology Conference for Educators in February, 2008, included:

- **Carol Broos, Sunset Ridge Music**
- **Charlene Entman, Teacher Technology Facilitator**
- **Regina Ruggie, Sixth Grade Teacher (pre-recorded)**
- **Sherri Styczen, Third Grade Teacher**
- **Henry Bacon, 6th Grade**
- **Derek Hawley, 6th Grade**
- **Liesel Magnusson, 8th Grade**
- **Frank O'Meara, 6th Grade**



Carol Broos, "Music Teacher of the Year," was joined by Principal Bryan Albro (l.) and band teacher Don Golden (r.) at the Illinois Music Educators Association Conference.

## District Readies for Phase 3 of Technology Plan

District 29 is preparing to implement Phase 3 of the Technology Plan that was approved in 2006.

"This is a well thought out plan," noted Superintendent Linda Vieth. "It anticipates the District's current and future technology needs. Based on teacher feedback, however, we have made some revisions that will accelerate access to technology enhancements for nearly the same cost as the original plan."

Acquisitions in the 2008-2009 school year will provide:

- Mobile laptop carts in each third and fourth grade classroom. Together with carts currently in use, these will provide 1:1 access for all third through fifth grade students.
- Promethean boards in third grade and Sunset Ridge classrooms
- New desktop computers for the Middlefork library and computer lab, Sunset Ridge library and MIDI-lab
- New laptop computers for all certified teachers and to provide 1:1 access in grades six through eight.

In addition, many of the computers being replaced will be repurposed for classroom and library use.

The technology committee is currently addressing the procedures necessary to phase in a plan for sixth through eighth graders to take laptops home. Their top priority is to insure safe, ethical and respectful use

of the Internet. Internet safety will be addressed with parents and students, and they will be required to sign an Authorized Use Policy before the computers may be taken home. Technology support for parents and students will be ongoing throughout the year.

Logistical concerns are also being addressed, such as how best to protect the computers from excessive wear and tear and determining the most ergonomic type of carrying case in which to transport the computers. Because some textbooks are now available on the Internet, it is anticipated that students will need to carry fewer books between home and school.

"The implementation of this next phase of the Technology Plan will enhance the use of technology as a dynamic and engaging teaching tool across all grade levels," Dr. Vieth stated. "It will allow teachers to do more with the curriculum."

**VIETH**, continued from page 1  
members reviewed the key principles of **Good to Great** and discussed our district's mission and beliefs. On April 16 team members analyzed our survey data, identifying areas of strength and areas for improvement. Team members also considered current trends in education and society, reflecting on the work of Thomas Friedman in **The World is Flat**. A frank examination of "where we are" and "where we want to be" will lead to the development of themes, goals, and measurable action plans at future meetings.

We expect to complete our plan by mid May. It will give the District clear direction and focus—a well-coordinated roadmap for our future endeavors and areas of study. We look forward to sharing the completed strategic plan with you!

Sincerely,

*Dr. Linda J. Vieth*

Superintendent of Schools



*Students in Mrs. Tuohy's fourth grade learned about verbs by taking pictures of themselves "in action" and creating a Verb Poster with a computer program called Comic Life. At left: A student uses the Promethean board to explain her poster.*

## A Fond Farewell to Pam Kennedy and Karen Byrnes

**Pam Kennedy** discovered her love for teaching as a volunteer at her son's elementary school and a day care teacher. These experiences prompted her to pursue a Master's degree and career in education. Linda Vieth, then Middlefork Principal, observed her at Baker Demonstration School and asked her to interview for a kindergarten position. After two years in that grade, Mrs. Kennedy moved to first, which she has taught for 13 years.

Mrs. Kennedy makes no small plans. "I want children to have a healthy self-concept when they leave my classroom. They should have fun learning and enjoy school. But I also want them to assume responsibility and become inner-directed. I want them to be respectful of themselves and each other, and to feel intellectually stimulated in a physically and emotionally safe environment. If they feel safe, then they can learn to risk and try out new ideas" she stated.

Mrs. Kennedy has enjoyed the opportunity to work with young children and their families, her wonderful friendships among colleagues, and a supportive administration. "I am proud of establishing a connection with the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago and opening the world of disabilities to children," she adds. "After 9/11, my class made American flag pins, and we had a ceremony honoring Northfield police and firefighters."

Mrs. Kennedy has agreed to supervise student teachers at National-Louis University and serve as a volunteer reading tutor. She intends to travel as often as possible to Japan, where her son and his family moved in January. "I am excited about whatever lies ahead. I will continue to contribute and to be with others—this is what makes me feel good," she noted. "Thank you for giving me 15 wonderful years to grow as a person. I have learned so much."

District families can thank two of the important men in **Karen Byrnes'** life for the good fortune of having her teach their children. When she was in college, Mrs. Byrnes' father encouraged her to pursue an education degree. She heeded his advice and taught approximately four years before devoting her time to raising a family. Children grown and twenty-odd years later, her husband urged her to return to teaching, telling her he knew she would love it. He was right!



*Pam Kennedy and Karen Byrnes were honored at a community reception on April 6.*

A year after retiring from St. Philip's School, Mrs. Byrnes missed the classroom and accepted a third grade position at Middlefork, where she has been for eight years.

"My goal as a teacher has been to have the highest expectations for each and every student—and to offer each child the skills and academics to perform and learn to the best of his or her ability, both in the classroom and in everyday life," Mrs. Byrnes explained. "Children will rise to the challenge when they are treated with respect, a sense of humor and the knowledge that someone believes in them."

The highlights of Mrs. Byrnes' career occur every day as she faces a group of eager, enthusiastic students. "Their wonderful minds are open, trusting and available to learn. It is a joy to observe the gleam in a child's eyes or the glow on a face when that child realizes he or she finally understands a concept," she described.

Mrs. Byrnes will miss the collegiality with her fellow educators, about whom she cannot say enough, and her interactions with the children and their families. But she eagerly looks forward to days of reading books, playing with grandchildren, traveling, restful afternoons on their boat and, perhaps, taking up cooking again.

"I have been fortunate to work in such a warm, safe, and happy environment for children."

*Thank you Mrs. Kennedy and Mrs. Byrnes!*

## Future Kindergartners Invited to Visit Middlefork on May 28

Prospective kindergartners and their parents are invited to attend a Kindergarten Open House at Middlefork School on Wednesday, May 28 between 3:15-4:30 p.m. and 6:00-7:00 p.m. Students will have an opportunity to see the kindergarten classrooms and meet the kindergarten teachers.

If you have a child who will be 5 years old by September 1, 2008, and have not yet enrolled for kindergarten, please call the school office at 881-9500. Similarly, if you are aware of students who will be new to District 29 in the fall or are planning to move out of the District, please let us know. Accurate enrollment figures are very important as we plan for the coming school year.



*Fish and aquatic life are part of the kindergarten science curriculum. A favorite activity is a visit from "Dan the Fish Man." Shown: Students observe and study a variety of types of fish.*

# School District 29

## BOARD OF EDUCATION REPORT

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