

SUNSET RIDGE

School District 29 Board Newsletter

www.sunsetridge29.net

November 2009

Cultivating a learning community that engages the hearts and minds of students, one child at a time



Dear Sunset Ridge Community Member,

In 1959 Middlefork School first opened its doors to 240 children in kindergarten, first, and second grades. One of the first primary schools on the North Shore, Middlefork catered to the unique learning needs of young children. Fifty years later, Middlefork continues its tradition of supporting our youngest learners. It thrives as a child-centered, technology-rich environment, nurturing students while preparing them for life in the twenty-first century.

This year Middlefork teachers welcomed 200 children in kindergarten through third grade, while 298 fourth through eighth grade students walked through the doors of Sunset Ridge. Both schools have seen many changes over the past 50 years. Many of these changes were put into place just this year! Some of the highlights include the following:

- Twenty minutes were added to Middlefork and Sunset Ridge school hours this year. The additional time has increased opportunities for academic learning and music instruction at Middlefork and has provided Sunset Ridge students time for enrichment,

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District Enrollment Report

Beginning-of-the-year enrollment figures reflect a modest decline from last year's student census. The total student body of 498 is five fewer than last year's enrollment and is consistent with projections by demographer John Kassarda.

Middlefork's student population rose to 200, an increase of nine. Kindergarten through second grades, with 43, 44 and 52 students respectively, are being taught in three sections, while the third grade group of 61 students is taught in four sections. The total of 13 classroom sections is one more than last year.

Enrollment at Sunset Ridge School declined from 312 in 2008-09 to 298 this year. While the number of students in the groups that are currently in grades five through eight is the same or slightly greater than last year, the incoming fourth grade is 19 fewer than last year's graduating class. Fourth, sixth and eighth grades are housed in three sections each, with enrollments of 40, 56 and 56 respectively. Grades five and seven, with 74 and 72 students respectively, are taught in four sections. The number of sections per grade reflects a continuing Board of Education priority on maintaining small class sizes. Thirteen District 29 students are taught in specialized settings, including four children in early intervention programs.

During the 1990's the student population steadily grew to a peak

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Principal Albro welcomed students to Sunset Ridge during an all-school assembly on the first day of classes.

District Welcomes New Faculty Members

Susan George, Counselor, K-5, spent 6 years in the business world before pursuing a Master of Education in Human Services and School Counseling at DePaul University. A June 2009 graduate, she also earned a BA in psychology from Miami University in Ohio. Mrs. George completed a one-year internship at Stone Scholastic Academy in Chicago, where she provided individual and group counseling and assessed students receiving special education services. A pet lover with two cats and a dog, Mrs. George enjoys travel and tennis and is learning to sew.

Mindy Golub, Grade 6 Language Arts, holds Bachelor of Arts degrees in secondary education and history from Lake Forest College. Initially hired last year as a teacher associate, Ms. Golub was soon asked to teach the Constitution class in 8th grade. She was a natural choice when a position opened this year. Ms. Golub previously filled a medical leave position at Highland Park High School and co-taught various subjects as an instructional assistant at Wood Oaks Junior High in Northbrook. She enjoys reading, writing, singing and playing the piano.

Claire Guinsburg, Grade 6 Student Services, began her career at Sunset Ridge in 2005 as a teacher associate. Continuing in that capacity while she earned a Masters degree in Special Education from Northeastern University, Ms. Guinsburg was promoted to her current position during the 2008-09 school year. She earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Public Affairs from Indiana University but realized her passion was working with children and began her career in education a few months later. Ms. Guinsburg enjoys cooking and is pleasantly surprised her meals have turned out well.

Amy Labbe, Grade 7 Student Services, earned a Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education from Barat College and clear certificates in Special Education from California Lutheran and California State-Channel Islands Universities. A Glenview native, she recently relocated to the Chicago area from California, where her teaching experiences include high school special education and junior high math and science. Ms. Labbe enjoys boating, hiking and playing with her dog in the great outdoors. She is an avid Sox fan.



Top, l-r: Amy Labbe, Jennifer Longo, Mindy Golub, Claire Guinsburg, Colleen Faber. Bottom left: Kellie Rouse, Susan George. Bottom right: Jesse Nolan, Kevin Petty.



Jennifer Longo, Grade 5, comes to Sunset Ridge from the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools, where she taught second grade. She previously taught grades 3 and 4 at Everett School in Lake Forest. She holds a BA in Elementary Education from the University of Iowa and a Master of Arts in the Social and Cultural Foundations of Education from DePaul University. Ms. Longo served on several curriculum committees in her prior districts. She can be found reading, searching for new music, or gallivanting with her dog, Augie, in her leisure time.

Jesse Nolan, Instrumental Music, earned Bachelor of Music Education and Master of Music degrees from Indiana University. A performer as well as an educator, he recently returned from a 7-month stint with the North American Tour of Jesus Christ Superstar and travelled with the 50th Anniversary European Tour of West Side Story. Teaching experiences include serving as Director of Instrumental Music at Benet Academy High School in Lisle and Assistant Director of Jazz Bands at Wheaton North High School. In addition to beginning a new job, Mr. Nolan has spent the past month getting married and moving into a newly purchased home.

Continued on next page

Facilities Projects Repair and Repurpose

Each summer Facilities Manager Mike Arnold and the custodial staff are busy readying the grounds and buildings of our schools for the coming year. The agenda this year was especially full as several areas were repurposed to provide additional classroom and instructional space. The retrofits at Sunset Ridge included:

- Dividing the technology office to add an ELL classroom and hallway
- Combining the maintenance office and dark room to create a gifted/enrichment classroom and office suite
- Refurbishing the workout room into a Spanish classroom
- Creating a staff bathroom and an office from former storage space.

In addition, several classrooms and hallways were painted; and several exterior areas were renovated to correct wear and tear.

Maintenance projects at Middlefork focused primarily on exterior life safety concerns such as replacing deteriorating sidewalks and curbs, replacing signage with sturdier posts and refurbishing fields and playgrounds.

The School Board thanks Mr. Arnold and our fine custodial staff for all your work in readying the grounds and buildings for the first day of school.



Students work on a project in the enrichment room, which previously housed a darkroom. Three faculty members share the adjoining office.

New Faculty, continued from page 2

Kellie Rouse, Kindergarten, anticipates receiving her Masters degree in Reading and Literacy from Benedictine University as this newsletter goes to press. She earned her Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education as a James Scholar at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Ms. Rouse comes to Middlefork from Freemont Intermediate School in Mundelein, where she taught fifth grade. She loves to travel and read in her leisure time.

Colleen Faber, Payroll, earned her Bachelor of Science in Accounting and Master of Business Administration degrees from Bradley University. She joins the District 29 Business Office from Hewitt Associates, where her experience includes serving as Benefits Operations Manager and Benefits Services Manager. Ms. Faber enjoys reading, walks with her golden retriever, and time with family and friends.

Kevin Petty, Sunset Ridge Technology Specialist, holds a Bachelor of Arts in Recording from Columbia College. He has served as a multimedia and technology specialist in the Mount Prospect, Wheeling High School and River Trails School Districts. His experiences have included the repair, imaging and maintenance of computers, printers and other hardware as well as creating graphics and audio-visual materials. Mr. Petty is an accomplished musician whose works can be heard on MTV and ESPN.

H1N1 Vaccine Update

The United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has recommended certain groups of people, including pregnant women and young people, 6 months through 24 years of age, be vaccinated against the H1N1 influenza virus as soon as that vaccine becomes available. It is important that parents contact their physicians to determine if the H1N1 vaccine is recommended for their children and if so, when they may receive the vaccination. Please note that the H1N1 vaccine is not intended to replace the seasonal flu vaccine – it is intended to be used along side the seasonal flu vaccine.

The New Trier Township School Districts are working with the Cook County Department of Public Health to establish cost-free township immunization sites for district students. Parents will be notified if and when this proposal is approved. Even if it is approved, this program would offer only one dose of vaccine and may not be available until later this fall or early winter. At this time, it is expected that in order to be fully immunized children under age 9 will need 2 doses of vaccine, administered 4 weeks or more apart. It would be each parent's responsibility to arrange with their physician for the other dose of vaccine.

Each family's health care provider continues to be the best source of information regarding their personal health needs and influenza vaccinations. We urge you to contact your family physician to discuss immunizing your family for both seasonal and H1N1 influenza. The following websites may be helpful: <http://www.flu.gov>, <http://www.cdc.gov>, and http://www.idph.state.il.us/h1n1_flu/sf_vaccine.htm.

Vieth, continued from page 1

social-emotional learning, and organizational activities.

- Several changes were made in the Sunset Ridge music program. Students who play string instruments will now have the opportunity to play in new string ensembles, while jazz band, “bucket band” and two chorale groups have been added to our before and after school offerings. A restructured music schedule means that students are no longer pulled out of class for music lessons.

- New reading materials are being introduced to students in second through fifth grades. These materials provide increased opportunities for reading strategy instruction, differentiation, and reading-writing connections, as well as more non-fiction resources. They will also dovetail with the popular, longstanding novel units in each of the grade levels.

- School Improvement Days will be held four times throughout the year. Students will be dismissed before lunch on these days, while teachers convene to work on special projects or participate in staff workshops. Our first School Improvement Day was held on September 18. On this day kindergarten and first grade teachers explored and evaluated new resources for phonics instruction, while teachers in grades 2–5 met to discuss how they are using the new reading materials with students and to receive further implementation tips and advice from the program’s reading consultant. Teachers in grades 6–8 discussed student discipline, identifying factors that perpetuate or fail to effectively inhibit misbehavior and ways to promote desired behavior. A Sunset Ridge Discipline Committee has been established to further explore the topic and make revisions to the school’s discipline practices.

Celebrating the Past, Strengthening the Present, Building for the Future

The District is now beginning Year II of the Strategic Plan. Several Action Plan Committees have moved into the implementation phases while others continue with research and planning. The Foreign Language Committee expects to make a recommendation regarding foreign language instruction at younger grades. The Communication Committee is now reviewing various communication vehicles at Middlefork including teacher newsletters and web pages, while Sunset Ridge teachers are reviewing current practices for parent teacher conferences and report cards. Two new Action Plan committees, SEL (Social Emotional Learning) and Sunset Ridge Discipline, have also been established.

The Facilities Study Committee is entering the “community engagement” phase of its work. (Read more about the Facilities Study on page 5.) An important part of this process will involve an exploration into future trends in school design and functionality. An effective, efficient twenty-first century facility must meet the needs of today’s students while preparing them for tomorrow. It must also meet the needs of tomorrow’s students, and prepare them for a future far beyond our current reality.

This year we are honoring our past, strengthening our present programs, and building for our future. We welcome all Sunset Ridge community members to join us in this venture!

Sincerely,

Linda J. Vieth, Ed.D.

Superintendent of Schools



Middlefork students took a step back in time on “1959 Day.” The day was held in anticipation of Middlefork’s 50th anniversary celebration. Participating in specially planned activities, the children learned about life in the fifties and the popular culture of that era. *Left:* First graders made album covers during an art activity. *Right:* Teachers display a 50th birthday quilt made last year by fourth graders that chronicals significant events since 1959. The students presented the quilt during an all-school assembly.



Facilities Update

At the October 6, 2009 Board of Education meeting the Board approved a contract with BLDD Architects to lead the District in a Community Engagement Project. The purpose of the project is to continue the facilities study begun last year and assist the District in designing a master plan for its facilities. The Community Engagement Project will progress through several phases and span the entire 2009-2010 school year. All stakeholders, including staff, parents, community members, and representatives from community groups and organizations are invited to participate. We envision an engaging and collaborative process that ultimately leads to a plan that supports the school's educational vision and provides the greatest benefit to the community at large.

In the early phases of the project, committee members will continue to collect and analyze data, building on the information that was gathered from our community survey, the Strategic Plan and Action Plan recommendations, and last year's facility analysis. Data collection will now focus on our future educational program and what our facilities must do in order to support that vision.

The next phase of the project will consist of a series of community meetings, which will be open to all who are interested. Possible facility solutions will be created and reviewed during the community meetings, and those that best support the future educational plan will be explored further. Our consultants from BLDD will present architectural illustrations and esti-



"Stomp" comes to Sunset Ridge. Bucket band is one of the new after school co-curricular options for students at Sunset Ridge. Response was so strong that music teacher Jesse Nolan divided the students into two sections. Using utility buckets as drums and stools, the students learn to synchronize their playing of various rhythms and sounds.

mated costs of the ideas generated, and participants will be given the opportunity to ask questions, expand concepts, and suggest changes. We anticipate that this part of the process will be complex; participants may express alternative points of view or prioritize needs differently. Our hope is that this detailed analysis of options will eventually lead to the identification of two or three conceptual plans that support our objectives. These ideas will be presented to the Board of Education, which will make the final decision near the end of this school year.

We invite all community members, parents and staff members to join us for some or all of the meetings. A list of dates and times will be made available in the coming weeks.

Teacher Associates Enhance Learning

District 29 is very fortunate to have highly qualified teacher associates supporting students in the classrooms and resource rooms.

All District 29 associates are certified teachers or currently pursuing graduate degrees in education.

Nineteen are returning associates; six have been in the District five or more years.

In addition, two full-time substitute teachers, who have also been in the District five or more years, provide continuity in the classroom when teachers are ill.

The Board of Education extends its deep appreciation to this dedicated group of professionals

Mission Impossible: Strategic Planning Update

Cultivating a learning community that engages the hearts and minds of students, one child at a time.

As District 29 strives for continuous growth in fulfilling its mission statement, faculty, administrators, board members and parents have participated in numerous curriculum and action committees focusing on specific themes identified in the 2008 Strategic Plan. Although the committees are ongoing, many recommendations have already been implemented.

Reading Curriculum

The District has adopted the McGraw Hill *Treasures* reading program for grades 2–5. “Teachers meet regularly in subject area teams for curriculum articulation and planning,” explained Dr. Mary Frances Greene, Curriculum Coordinator. “As we discussed the reading program, our students’ progress and the RTI model of service, we agreed that students would benefit from a more cohesive reading program.”

Treasures offers consistency, thematic content choices and sequential learning from grade to grade. The program focuses on six themes during the course of the year. Each unit includes several fiction and non-fiction selections, read-aloud, and leveled guided reading materials. The coordinating *Triumphs* program offers corresponding materials, so that students who benefit from differentiation greater than *Treasures* provides can learn as part of the classroom group.

“The program offers a broad range of quality materials, which permits a more efficient use of teacher time. It is also organized in a way that facilitates analysis and documentation of individual students’ progress and struggles, so children

can receive the instruction and services they need,” Dr. Greene added.

Instrumental Music

A key recommendation of the Band Action Committee was to provide instrument lessons at a designated time rather than pulling students from other classes. Students now receive this instruction during the new flex period in grades 4 and 5 and before school in grades 6, 7, and 8. These changes became possible with the longer day and scheduling modifications that were put in place this year.

A third music teacher, Jesse Nolan, was hired to strengthen the string instrument program and co-curricular offerings. Twelve fourth and twelve fifth grade students are now studying string instruments. In addition to string lessons, Mr. Nolan directs 4th–5th and 6th–8th choral groups and bucket bands before and after school, while Mr. Golden directs the junior high jazz band.

A proposal for expanded music facilities has been referred to the facilities committee. Specific recommendations include more instructional areas to accommodate the growing string program, better acoustics, practice rooms and a more suitable performance venue.

Workload

The workload committee reviewed the nature and amount of homework assigned by grade level at Sunset Ridge relative to best practice research and in comparison with other feeder schools to New Trier. The committee drafted a set of homework guidelines specifying the purposes, types and recommended

amount of homework by grade level and delineating the various communication tools in place to facilitate dialogue between parents, students and teachers. The guidelines will be finalized later this fall.

Enrollment, continued from page 1

enrollment of 557 in 2003-04. Dr. Kassarda attributed this rise primarily to the high number of families with school-age children moving into the District compared to those moving out. Since then, smaller kindergarten classes have been replacing the larger graduating classes. If family in-migration continues as anticipated, enrollment is expected to remain fairly stable over the coming decade.

A staff of 63 certified teachers, 28 teacher associates, and four technology specialists is in place to assure the quality of academic and co-curricular programs.

Eleven new families joined the District this year. Please welcome the Baker, Bauer, Bond, Corral, Delevski, Diaz, Hagen, Koenig, Malnati, Miller, Pavlov/Dobrobroz, Pecard and Roszak families when you see them at school and in the community.



First graders became reacquainted with one another and their new classroom on the opening day of school.

Standardized Assessments Inform Teaching

District 29 administers two standardized assessments each year: the state-mandated Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) and the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), which was approved by the School Board and initiated last year.

ISAT, which measures individual student achievement relative to the Illinois Learning Standards is administered in the spring to students in grades 3–8. All students are assessed in reading and math. Students in grades 3, 5, 6, and 8 are also tested in writing, and grades 4 and 7 are tested in science. The results give parents, teachers and schools one measure of student learning and school performance. It is important to note that these results must be viewed with caution for various reasons:

- District 29 has a very small sample size
- Cohorts change from year to year
- Test items change from year to year
- Performance standards change over time
- A student’s performance can be influenced by many variables on any given day.

The 2008-09 test results for District 29 reveal high achievement across all grades in reading, math and science. Performance in written language was mixed, with grades 3 and 8 showing high achievement and grades 5 and 6 showing lower than expected achievement. Consistent with the District goal of moving “from good to great,” test results were analyzed over time by grade level and cohorts of students. This

revealed variability in reading performance among different cohorts. The finding, among other factors, prompted the District to adopt a universal reading curriculum that enhances consistency across and between grade levels. (See article on page 6.)

The writing assessments have been in place for only a couple of years, and it is difficult to determine at this point whether the variability in our scores are reflective of our program or flaws in the assessment instrument. Nonetheless, District faculty and administrators are analyzing our writing program as it aligns with state standards.

MAP Test to Inform Instructional Planning

The MAP test was chosen by District 29 because of the opportunities it affords to support our mission of educating students one child at a time. Aggregate scores are not considered with the MAP test; rather, the results are reviewed child by child.

MAP tests were administered in September to all students in grades 3–8. Together with the assessments taken by students last year, these results provide teachers with several data points that will be analyzed for the purpose of enhancing differentiation and instructional planning.

During the October Institute Day a presenter from the Northwest Evaluation Association, developers of MAP, instructed teachers on data analysis and program design. The District intends to begin utilizing MAP data for instructional planning later this year.

Summer: Time For Teachers to Plan and Learn

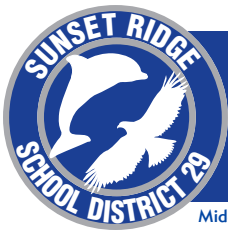
Summer curriculum work is an integral part of the school year in District 29. Nearly every faculty member chooses to participate in one or more projects designed to enhance curriculum or further the District goals. This past summer the District sponsored 14 summer activities. These included several workshops supporting staff implementation of the technology plan, committee work, and classes on best practice in reading and classroom management.

In addition to District-sponsored activities, teachers can propose projects of their own design. This summer 18 proposals involving one or more teachers were approved. A sampling of the topics includes curriculum development in instrumental music, the Holocaust, and cross-curricular lessons in science, math and technology. Student services projects supported the RTI model of service delivery and compliance with state mandates.

Out of the Mouths of Babes...

Dr. Ken Smith was teaching a lesson on communities to a class of third graders. He asked the students to give examples and describe what commonalities make them a community.

“The world is kind of a community,” one student offered. Asked why, she explained, “Well, we are all in this life together!”



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DISTRICT 29

Pinwheels Proclaim a Message of Peace

Students in grades 4–8 participated in the Pinwheels for Peace project on September 21 (also recognized as International Peace Day). Pinwheels for Peace is an art installation project started in 2005 by two art teachers in Florida. The project was quickly embraced by their students and the entire school community and by millions of art teachers, teachers, parents, children and adults as an expression of their desire for peace in our world.

Art teacher Lynn Horne spearheaded the project at Sunset Ridge. Students made pinwheels for peace in classrooms and advisories as well as during art classes.

"It was my hope that through this project students could have an opportunity to make a public visual statement expressing their feelings about war, peace, tolerance and cooperation," Mrs. Horne explained. "Art is not just beautiful to look at; it can be used as a powerful way to send a message, as well."



Fifth graders displayed their pinwheels and a banner they made honoring Peace Day in front of Sunset Ridge.