



SUNSET RIDGE

School District 29 Board Newsletter

www.sunsetridge29.net

June 2009

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



Dear Sunset Ridge Community Member,

Our recently developed Strategic Plan contains several action plans pertaining to curriculum and the delivery of instruction. There is, however, one action plan that addresses our school facilities.

Dr. Linda Vieth Integrating a facilities goal with our educational goals makes good sense; the facilities must support our students and staff while providing an environment conducive to 21st century learning and teaching practices.

The Facilities Study Action Plan Committee, along with BLDD architectural firm, recently completed a comprehensive analysis of all aspects of our school buildings. We have now begun the process of prioritizing the various areas of need outlined in BLDD's report. We will carefully scrutinize the data against various factors, including safety and security, educational benefit to students, support of our strategic plan, budgetary impact and current economic conditions. (Please read more about the facilities study on page 6.)

As the committee reviewed the data gathered by BLDD and discussed the current standards used for determining effective building usage, it could not ignore the fact that our method of delivering instruction is very different from years ago when our buildings were first constructed and later remodeled. A commitment to reduced class sizes, expanded student support services, and small group instruction has dramatically changed how we use our facilities and the space within our schools. These goals translate into increased differentiation of instruction, greater support of individual social, emotional, and behavioral needs, and enhanced quality of life within the school.

They support our mission to “cultivate a learning community that engages the hearts and minds of

(Please see **Vieth**, page 4)

Social Emotional Learning Improves Academics

“Think of someone you would consider successful. You can define success however you wish - for example, a successful CEO, entrepreneur, teacher, student, or parent. Now, think of the qualities that make this person successful.” This was the task Dr. Ed Dunkelblau assigned teachers at the March Institute Day on social emotional learning (SEL). Faculty members described their successful person as a good listener, ethical, confident, understanding, respectful, a team player and more. These traits, Dr. Dunkelblau explained, are among those comprising Emotional Intelligence or EQ, a social intelligence based on an awareness of feelings and emotions. What's more, he went on, research suggests that success, however defined, is 80% EQ and only 20% IQ, or the traits that are typically thought to represent intelligence. At the student level, research indicates that social emotional competency improves readiness to learn, classroom behavior and academic performance.

Dr. Dunkelblau is the Director of the Institute for Emotionally Intelligent Learning and consults with schools nationwide on implementing SEL programs. During the course of the Institute Day, he led

(Please see **SEL**, page 5)



Service learning is an important component of a social emotional learning program. Students helped sort donations at the District 29 Spring Greening recycling event in March.

Retiring School Board Members Share Reflections

Marti Bennett, Peter Fischer and Gordon Scott joined the school board together in 2005. Upon their retirement from these positions in April, they reflected upon their tenure as board members.

Describing the rewards of serving on the school board, Mr. Fischer, who has served as president for the last two years, highlighted “being part of a team devoted to ensuring the continued success of two already good schools.” Mr. Scott enjoyed getting more involved and knowledgeable about our schools, while Mrs. Bennett valued “being able to give back a small part of what my family has gained over the past 18 years.”

Among their accomplishments the three mentioned hiring Dr. Vieth as superintendent, complimented by a strong administrative team; conducting a districtwide survey that served as the basis for creating a comprehensive and user-friendly strategic plan; establishing a strong technology program; and engaging in a full scale facilities study.

Asked for words of wisdom, Mrs. Bennett encouraged continuing community support of the District. “The great staff and administration are the key factors in making this a great district,” she stated. Mr. Scott



Retiring school board members (l.-r.): Gordon Scott, Marti Bennett, Peter Fischer.

noted the importance of maintaining perspective. “In the school community this can be done by focusing on what is in the best long-term interest of our students,” he explained. Mr. Fischer advised getting involved. “Attend meetings, volunteer, but most important, don’t be influenced by rumors.”

The District community thanks Mrs. Bennett, Mr. Fischer and Mr. Scott for their wise and thoughtful service to the children of Middlefork and Sunset Ridge Schools.

Board Honors Student Volunteers

Continuing its tradition of recognizing community members who support the work of District 29, the school board honored Cub Scout Pack 17 (top) for their participation in the fall E-Waste Recycling event and student volunteers at the Spring Greening event held in March.



District Welcomes New School Board Members

Shaun O'Leary first became interested in serving on the school board when he saw a notice on the community center door three years ago. A five-year resident of Northfield, he decided the timing was now right to become involved. Dr. O'Leary, a neurosurgeon, is an educator himself, teaching medical students and residents on a daily basis. "I'm a good listener, which will serve me well as a school board member," he noted.

Dr. O'Leary believes continuing the legacy of the District as it addresses the facilities study is a priority. "The strong support of community residents without children in the schools and the small size of the District are two of its greatest strengths and have helped to create that legacy," he added. Dr. O'Leary and his wife have three children, ages 9, 7, and 4. He enjoys coaching lacrosse and participating in Cub Scouts with his son.

Debbie Papas combines her love of children and education with a desire to give back to the community in serving on the school board. Three year residents of Northfield, she and her husband have sons in third grade and pre-kindergarten. "I hope I can be a fair and well thought out voice in the various situations that the board encounters. The children and their well being are always at the forefront of my actions," she commented.

Ms. Papas described the Strategic Plan as a good guide for the various ways the community thinks the schools can improve. "The school board needs to be continually working to improve on the successful foundation already in place," she stated. "I am looking forward to seeing the various curricular changes, such as band and foreign language, studied and implemented." She noted the positive impact of a supportive community. "Parents, community members, administration and the educators make our district work and work well."



Board of Education members (l.-r.) Doug Warshauer, Debbie Papas, and Shaun O'Leary

Doug Warshauer and his wife are seven year

residents of Northfield. They have four children, ages 10, 8, 6, and 5. Mr. Warshauer brings extensive experience in financial management and participating on the boards of for-profit and not-for-profit organizations to the Board of Education. He described his interest in serving: "The schools are so important to our community. I thought this would be a very worthwhile area to donate my time." He plans to continue coaching his children's sports teams as well.

He identifies maintaining and building upon the tremendous success the schools have achieved as a priority. He credits the administration and faculty as the greatest strengths of the District.

Principal for a Day

A coveted auction item at the annual PTO benefit is the privilege of serving as Principal of the Day. Principal Emily shadowed Mr. Albro through a PTO meeting, lunchroom supervision, teacher observations and more.

"It was really fun," Emily related. "My favorite parts were planning for the art program next year, interviewing new teachers and meeting with Mrs. McDowell about the laptops."

The PTO benefit supports special projects and resources not included in the District budget. The District is grateful for the many ways the PTO enhances learning in our schools.



School Board, Teachers Announce Contract

The District 29 Board of Education and Sunset Ridge Education Association are pleased to announce that a new two-year contract was signed on May 15, 2009. The District has done an excellent job of managing both its finances and its priorities amid challenging economic times. As a result, the Board and SREA were able to unanimously approve a contract that will benefit our schools and community.

The first year of the contract reflects the District's commitment to the goal of attracting, hiring and retaining quality staff. The length of the previous five-year contract had allowed our salaries to fall significantly behind surrounding area averages. Therefore an adjustment was made to the salary schedule as a whole and yearly step increases were adjusted to 3.3% to achieve competitive compensation levels. The second year of the contract sets a 3.5% increase. Insurance benefits remain the same. Retirement was aligned with recent legislative caps.

A significant outcome of the negotiations that directly benefits all our students is an agreement to add 20 minutes to the school day. Additionally, two days will be phased into the school year. In 2009, this will appear as a teacher institute day, and will not affect the student calendar year in 2009-2010. Four early release/late start days will also be scheduled into the school calendar. On these days, students will either arrive later or leave early in order to allow teachers time to collaborate and plan to meet the needs of all students.

The teachers and administration are currently collaborating to determine the timing and schedule of these changes, and parents will be notified of the details by early July. They recognize that these changes will affect families and their schedules and are doing their best to minimize the impact.

The outcomes of the collective bargaining process support students' needs and ensure that District 29 will continue to be an outstanding place to teach and to learn.

Vieth, continued from page 1

students, one child at a time.”

This fact has become even more apparent as we plan for the 2009-2010 school year. Although our anticipated enrollment is somewhat less than in previous years, we find ourselves needing additional classroom space at Sunset Ridge and filling every room at Middlefork. This is because smaller class sizes require more sections at each grade level, and therefore, more classrooms are utilized. We expect that the projected K-8 enrollment figure of 485 will continue to fluctuate during the spring and summer months as new students move in or others move away. We are closely monitoring the numbers, and are exploring options to properly house next years' students.

We will continue to keep you informed as we review enrollment figures, work with BLDD's data and prioritize future facility needs. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions about the facilities study or if you wish to discuss it further.

Sincerely,

Dr. Linda J. Vieth

Superintendent of Schools



Middlefork Pajama Day has become a favorite tradition during National Reading Month. Dressed in pajamas, the students listened to a storyteller in the morning and were served “breakfast for lunch.” Shown: The entire school gathered to share books with their reading buddies in the afternoon.

SEL, continued from page 1

faculty through discussions and activities designed to enhance understanding of social emotional learning and its importance. He noted the challenges of working against an accelerated pace of life, economic pressures on parents, and the values students learn through their exposure to popular culture. He asked teachers to reflect on a vision of what District 29 might become with a clear and coordinated program for social emotional learning.

In recent years, educators have become increasingly aware of the positive impact of social emotional intelligence. In 2004 Illinois became one of the first states to incorporate social emotional goals into the Learning Standards mandated for all public schools. The three goals are broad statements of purpose, supplemented by specific statements of the knowledge and skills to be taught within grade-level clusters.

District Has History of Educating the Whole Child

Participants in the strategic planning process in 2008 were very deliberate in their choice and sequence of words: cultivating the *hearts* and minds of students, *one child at a time* (emphasis added). The statement reflects both a vision for the future and an acknowledgement of longstanding practice.

Demonstrating the District's commitment to social emotional learning the school board approved the appointment of Marti von Kluck, district social worker, as half time Wellness Coordinator for the current school year. One of her first priorities was to develop and conduct a needs assessment among district faculty and staff. The purpose of the assessment was to identify what programs and curricula are already in place as well as the perceived needs and challenges to implementing a comprehensive SEL program. The findings were shared with staff at the Institute Day and will provide a basis for ongoing planning to develop a comprehensive and coordinated SEL curriculum.

One of the hallmarks of the District's emphasis on SEL is its character education program. First piloted ten years ago, the program provides a sequence of instruction beginning with feelings and friendship in the primary grades; relationship building, empathy and social inclusion in the elementary years; and responsibility to self and others in junior high. These lessons are taught directly in dedicated character education lessons and/or topic-specific programs, such as



First graders practice cooperation, a social emotional skill, when they build leprechaun traps as part of a science unit on simple machines.

Internet Safety/Cyberbullying and RAPS (relationships, adolescent and puberty skills), which is taught in junior high. The messages of character education are also modeled, practiced and infused within the curriculum and informal discussions.

Dr. Dunkelblau described character education as an ethical compass. Social emotional learning provides the set of skills that permit one to develop meaningful relationships predicated on good character in the classroom, playground, family, community and workplace.

The Sunset Ridge community places a high priority on academic achievement. Yet the first question most parents are likely to ask is not "What important fact did you learn?" but rather, "Whom did you sit with at lunch today?"

"We are beginning a journey to help each child become socially competent and feel connected at school. It is especially rewarding to know this will also reduce emotional barriers to learning and improve academic performance," Mrs. von Kluck noted.



*Hats Off to Dr. Ken Smith
who presented
"Are We Teaching Our Gifted Writers
to Write Like Beginners?"
at the Illinois Gifted Association Conference
in February.*

School Board Determines Priorities, Guidelines for Facilities Planning

Community Input Will Inform Decision-Making

In September of 2008, District 29 embarked upon a comprehensive review of the Middlefork and Sunset Ridge facilities as an outcome of its Strategic Plan. The architectural firm, BLDD, was hired to document the current condition of the facilities. The term “facilities review” encompasses two components—the physical structures and the ability of those structures to support educational goals. According to School Board President Phoebe Raymond, “BLDD found that the District has done an excellent job of maintaining our buildings. They are safe and durable structures. The design of the buildings has begun to limit our ability to support changing educational needs. Alignment with education in the 21st century education suggests a redefinition of our educational space that not only supports present practice but also anticipates the future. As we move forward our facilities should reflect a commitment to differentiated instruction, collaborative learning,

technology needs, and our strategic initiatives.”

BLDD presented their preliminary findings and recommendations to the Board in April. Along with general maintenance needs, their recommendations were categorized by educational delivery, comfort, and safety. The recommendations the Board was asked to consider included:

- Creation of a large multi-purpose space that would accommodate meetings, performances, and be divisible for classrooms
- Support of individualized instruction and collaboration by designing breakout/small group instruction spaces
- Further infrastructure support for technology
- Modular classroom furniture to support flexible instruction and the laptop program
- Establishing a storage policy to maximize space
- Evaluation of indoor air quality and thermal comfort as they impacts the learning environment
- Evaluation of the functional adjacencies of classrooms and their acoustical impact on the learning environment
- Review of building access (ADA needs as well as security) and ingress/ egress issues

Prudent fiscal management requires the District to set priorities in evaluating the BLDD recommendations. “Clearly the District has some immediate facilities needs that must be addressed. Our commitment to small class size and personalized instruction has created a need for more classroom space. The BLDD findings remind

us, however, that in designing a solution to that problem we must not shortchange the future,” noted Superintendent Linda Vieth. Moving forward, facilities decisions must reflect the following guidelines:

- 1) demonstrate the District's commitment to an outstanding academic program now and in the future
- 2) support the outcomes of the Strategic Plan
- 3) improve the quality of the student/staff learning environment
- 4) incorporate coherent design in planning for access, circulation, and flexibility
- 5) be respectful of the economic climate and maintain fiscal responsibility.

The District is committed to engaging the community as it begins the task of setting priorities and designing solutions. The public is invited to special meetings on June 23rd, July 14th, and August 18th to discuss the recommendations. All meetings begin at 6:00 p.m. and are held in the Sunset Ridge Learning Center. In addition, a website has been established to communicate the BLDD findings, announce future facilities meetings, and document progress. Please visit the District website at www.sunsetridge29.net. Click on “Our District” and scroll down to “Facilities Study.” There you will also find an online suggestion form, which will allow you to share your thoughts with the Facilities Study Committee. “Parents, community members, and staff are invited to participate in this process. We welcome your input,” emphasized Phoebe Raymond.



Hallways are often used as breakout space at Middlefork and Sunset Ridge.

Views of the Schools



Explorers' Club provides first graders the opportunity to research and explore a topic of their own choosing. The students brainstorm areas of interest and then meet in small groups to learn about one of their favored choices. Topics this year included dogs, mythology, snakes, dangerous creatures, art, the Sears Tower, science, and football. During the first part of Explorers' Club the children gather information from books, videos, CD-ROMs, websites and field trips. The next phase of the unit involves hands-on preparation of models, demonstrations or posters to present their new knowledge to others. "I especially liked being able to share what we had learned with others," first grader Heidi B. commented. Shown: Students learn how to make paper in the art group..

Middlefork students extended a heartfelt thank-you to the many parent and community volunteers at the Volunteer Celebration in April. In recognition of National Poetry Month, each class recited a poem thanking the volunteers for the many ways they contribute to our schools. Shown: Second graders thank field trip chaperones.



Sunset Ridge students wrote and produced their own staging of "The Wizard of Oz" in a junior high acting elective. The troupe performed the play for each grade level at Middlefork and answered questions from the young audience at the end of the show. Shown: Junior high actors with Mrs. Golomb's kindergarten class.

As part of the Winnetka-Northfield "One Book Two Villages" program, 5th grade students read the novel **Ida B.** and met with New Trier High School students for book discussions. Students also were thrilled to meet the author, Katherine Hannigan. The District thanks Ms. Bronwyn Parhad (seated, left) of the Winnetka Public Library for organizing this event.





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Marti von Kluck
Editor

District 29 website
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DISTRICT
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Future Kindergartners Visit Middlefork

Prospective kindergartners and their parents were invited to attend a Kindergarten Open House at Middlefork School on Wednesday, May 28. Incoming students had the 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, 2009, 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.



Kindergartners show mixed emotions about touching fish during a hands-on science lesson about fish and their ocean environment. "Dan the Fish Man" of Sunset Foods is an annual visitor to Middlefork kindergarten classrooms.