

THE PROUD 23 COMMUNITY Connection

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE PROSPECT HEIGHTS SCHOOL DISTRICT 23 COMMUNITY

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A FEW WORDS FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

We've had a busy start to the year! So much of our "normal" school life has finally returned, and the buildings are buzzing with activity. I'm proud of our students for their hard work and active involvement in school-day and extracurricular opportunities. This year we will be working on four projects that will shape the future of our District for years to come. Look for planning updates in future newsletters.

First, we are updating the Strategic Plan. The current plan goes through 2023, so it's time to set our course of action and direction for the years to come. We are also working on an Equity Scan to ensure we're providing equitable access and creating a welcoming community. And we are conducting a Safety and Security Audit to keep our buildings as safe as they can possibly be.

Also, as you've hopefully heard, we've been working on the Building a Better D23 project and seeking community input about the District's urgent needs and potential solutions. The Board of Education will decide by mid-January whether to place a tax referendum on the April 2023 ballot. We've already communicated a great deal of information about this, and you can find an overview inside this newsletter.

Thanks to the many community members who have been part of this important work, by sharing thoughts and ideas the past few months. We greatly value your insight as we make decisions that affect your school district and your community. Please note there is still time to take the Building a Better D23 survey, which is due Nov. 30. You can also get involved by joining one of our Community Focus Groups to share your thoughts and feedback. If you want to know more, contact the District office to sign up.

As Thanksgiving approaches, there are many reasons we're **PROUD TO BE D23**. Some of the people and things we're most grateful for are featured on the pages that follow. I hope you'll take a few minutes to read about them. Happy Thanksgiving!

Don Angelaccio, Ed.D.

Superintendent of Schools,
Prospect Heights School District 23



A STELLAR RUNNING SEASON: The MacArthur girls' cross country team won the Conference meet for the first time since 2003. Both the boys' and girls' teams qualified for sectionals, and three runners from the girls' team competed at the State IESA Meet on Oct. 15. Congrats to the runners and coaches for their hard work, sportsmanship and awesome representation of MacArthur and District 23 this season!

'THIS IS YOUR COMMUNITY, AN

BUILDING A BETTER D23

DISTRICT 23 LOOKS TO THE FUTURE: IDENTIFYING URGENT NEEDS, PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS AND FINANCING PLAN

Throughout the fall, District 23 has been educating community members about high-priority facility and programming needs and the possibility of placing a limiting-rate tax referendum on the ballot in April 2023. If approved, the new funding would benefit all four schools, with projects that:

- Add and reconfigure instructional space to allow all eligible D23 students to participate in full-day kindergarten and early-childhood education programming
- Address overcrowding
- Address critical repairs and maintenance to existing facilities
- Enhance safety and security
- Solve space needs for student support services
- Further support the community's needs

"We are focused on finding fiscally responsible ways to protect and improve our schools, as well as meet

educational goals that we are currently not able to meet," says Don Angelaccio, Ed.D., superintendent.

The proposed Districtwide facility projects include:

- Adding security cameras
- Replacing old exterior windows and doors
- Replacing outdated siding

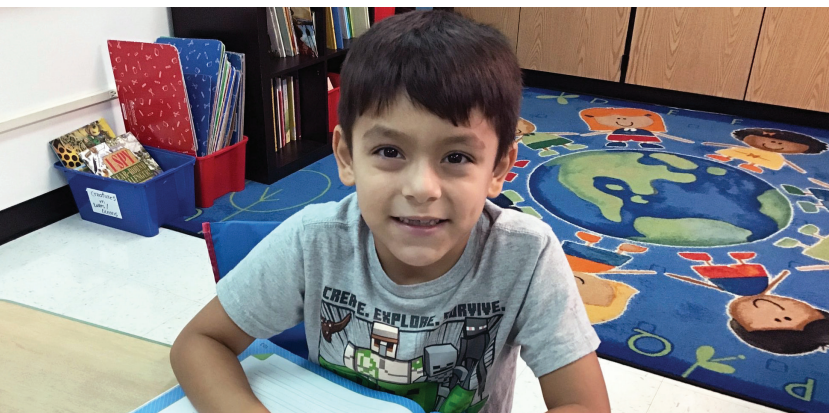
A proposal to expand Eisenhower Elementary includes:

- The addition of eight new classrooms to provide full-day kindergarten and expand early-childhood offerings
- A new multipurpose room for lunch, physical education, after-school programs and other needs driven by increased enrollment
- A new secure main entrance
- A reconfigured parking and traffic loop to improve pedestrian and vehicular safety

- Added/reconfigured space for school psychologists, speech therapists and other specialists so that library space can be reclaimed

Eisenhower is currently at capacity and unable to offer full-day kindergarten and early-childhood education programs for all students. In fact, due to current space constraints, 35% of eligible students cannot participate in early-childhood programs in District 23.

Angelaccio says the proposed projects could improve learning outcomes for the District's current students, as well as for those who will attend D23 schools in the years to come. He says the projects also extend the useful life of existing facilities, reduce costly emergency repairs and improve energy efficiency – saving taxpayer dollars and benefiting homeowners. In addition, the improvements would align District 23's offerings with those of peer districts that already have full-day kindergarten, enhancing the District's appeal to local families and protecting property values.



EARLY LEARNING IS ESSENTIAL: If longstanding early childhood education needs are met, it is estimated that an additional 140 students would be served. Early learning opportunities are a priority because they create a foundation for sustained educational growth in first grade and beyond.

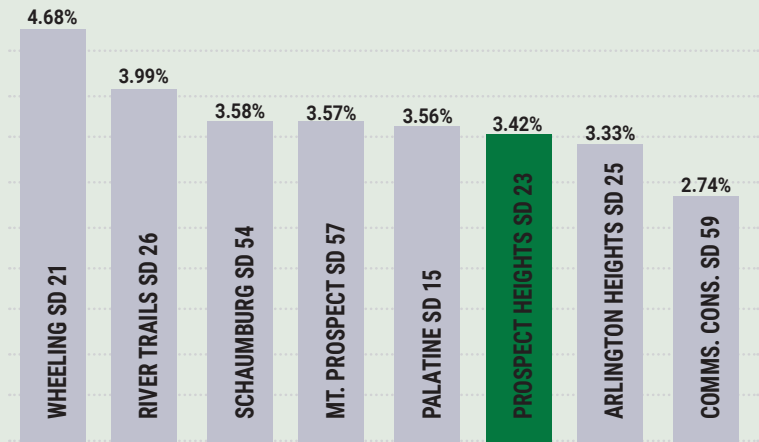
TIMELINE/NEXT STEPS

- Survey deadline: Nov. 30
- Community Task Force to review feedback: early December
- Board of Education meeting to review survey data, hear community comments and discuss options: Dec. 14, 7 p.m., Anne Sullivan School
- Board to decide whether to place a referendum on the ballot: by Jan. 17, 2023 (state deadline)
- Election Day: April 4, 2023
- If funding approved
 - Design phase/project bidding: early 2024
 - Construction: summer 2024 - summer 2025

AND THESE ARE YOUR SCHOOLS'

FINANCIAL FAST FACTS

- The estimated cost of the proposed improvements is \$24 million. The financing plan calls for \$4 million to be funded with non-referendum dollars. The rest of the improvements would be funded by the additional tax revenue from a successful referendum.
- The District is considering placing a limiting rate increase of .472 on the April 2023 ballot. About 58% of the proceeds from the increase would go toward paying off debt certificates used to fund capital improvements, and 42% would address operating costs (staffing, materials, utilities and ongoing maintenance related to the expansion of full-day kindergarten and early-childhood education programming).
- The estimated annual tax impact is \$44.65 per \$1,000 of taxes paid, or approximately \$486 for a home with a fair market value of \$350,000.
- Property taxes are the main source of revenue for District 23. The District maintains low fund balances (cash on hand), which means there are no extra funds for improving the schools without issuing taxpayer-approved bonds.
- Compared to its seven peer districts, District 23 has the third lowest tax rate at 3.416 percent.
- The last time the District 23 community approved a referendum was 1987, 35 years ago.
- As responsible stewards of the taxpayers' tax dollars, the District is committed to its obligation to maintain the community's investment in the facilities, programs and people that make D23 such an awesome place for teaching and learning.



When compared to other area elementary schools, D23's tax rate is the third lowest.

WE ASKED, YOU ANSWERED

In planning for the future, District 23 has applied several phases of community engagement to ensure taxpayers are well informed and actively involved in the process. This includes:

- Focus groups that began in December 2021 and provided initial ideas as the planning process was launched.
- A Citizens' Task Force made up of a diverse group of stakeholders who have been meeting since the summer to review the proposed plans and share insight and feedback. The Task Force will make a recommendation to the School Board in December.
- Five information sharing events that were held in September and October and were widely attended by a cross section of community members, who listened to a District presentation, asked questions and shared input.
- A detailed D23 Planning Update that was mailed to all registered voters who reside in District 23 boundaries.
- A communitywide survey that also was mailed to residents. Community members are encouraged to complete the survey by Nov. 30, utilizing the website or return envelope provided in the mailing.



School Board members will consider the Citizen Task Force recommendation, the survey results and other community input as they decide whether to place a referendum on the ballot. The District thanks the many stakeholders who have participated in the important community engagement process.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

FOR MORE DETAILED INFORMATION, PLEASE READ THE EXTENSIVE D23 PLANNING UPDATE THAT WAS MAILED TO HOMES. DETAILS ALSO CAN BE FOUND AT WWW.D23.ORG IN THE BUILDING A BETTER D23 SECTION.



Eighth graders test robots they created as part of MacArthur's new dual-credit Robotics class.

IGNITING A PASSION FOR STEM PARTNERSHIP WITH D214 BRINGS DUAL-CREDIT ROBOTICS TO MACARTHUR

MacArthur Middle School eighth graders are designing, building and programming a robot – and getting high school credit for it. It's all part of the school's new dual-credit Robotics class, the result of a partnership with District 214 that enables students to do a deep dive into engineering and other STEM fields.

The year-long, eighth-grade class is an expansion of MacArthur's Applied Technology, which is offered to sixth through eighth graders. Eighth graders can now apply to take Robotics in place of Applied Technology and other Exploratory classes. The 17 students who were selected to take part in the inaugural session this school year are learning things like mechanical engineering, programming, 3D modeling and design.

Principal Cam Nystrom, Ed.D., says District 23 worked with District 214 administration to design the class so it has similar curriculum and outcomes as entry-level engineering classes at

the high schools. Eighth graders who successfully complete the class will earn credit for high school Robotics 1.

"There are so many great opportunities at Hersey, Wheeling and the other D214 schools. Taking a dual-credit class as an eighth grader helps free students up to take advantage of more opportunities over the next few years," Nystrom says, adding that the new class has been well received. "There's a lot of energy in the room. It's a unique chance to find connections, which is so important in middle school."

Throughout first semester, students in the Robotics class are working together to build a robot that they will compete with in the FIRST LEGO League Challenge in December in Mount Prospect, which will attract hundreds of students from throughout the area.

In addition to the new class, District 23 has an extracurricular robotics club and a longstanding partnership with District 214's WildStang FIRST Robotics team.

The WildStang team meets regularly at MacArthur, and its members mentor D23 robotics club members.

Filip Dudic, who teaches Applied Technology and Robotics at MacArthur and helps coach both the D23 and D214 teams, says the partnership has benefitted both districts. D214 has provided MacArthur with 3D printers and robots, and the mentorship makes an impact on the younger students. At the same time, it's important for WildStang members from different schools to be able to come together under one roof and to have use of MacArthur's robotics workshop and equipment.

Dudic says participating in robotics opportunities is beneficial whether students think they want to pursue STEM careers or not. "We are reinforcing creativity, problem solving and other critical thinking skills that are required in almost any job," he says, adding that students are "working together, super engaged and having fun."



COMING HOME TO D23: Many D23 alumni recently have returned to the schools that shaped them to work as teachers and other staff. Nicole Dorcey (pictured) attended Ross, Eisenhower and MacArthur and came back to Eisenhower as a first-grade teacher this fall. After graduating from Illinois State University in 2021 and teaching elsewhere for a year, she was thrilled to have the chance to join the D23 community again. "I feel like I've come home," she says, adding that her teammates and school families have made her feel so welcome and supported. Some of her new colleagues, along with principal Luke Lambatos, Ed.D., were at Eisenhower when Dorcey was a student! Dorcey is not alone in the desire to return to D23 roots. Her Eisenhower classmate Joe Nudo is now a learning behavior specialist teacher at Sullivan, and alumna Heather Jackson is a sixth-grade teacher at MacArthur.



EXPANDING CLASSROOM WALLS ... INTO THE GREAT OUTDOORS

District 23 kicked off the 2022-2023 school year by unveiling some exciting additions that will support and enhance student learning for years to come. Over the summer, the District transformed green spaces at all four schools, utilizing federal funding from the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) program, which was created to help school districts nationwide address the impact of the pandemic.

- At MacArthur Middle School, the District added a learning space outside of the cafeteria entrance and transformed the existing courtyard into an engaging outdoor classroom and gathering area, with the installation of multimedia capabilities, seating and inviting elements, a sensory path and a butterfly garden.
- At Betsy Ross and Anne Sullivan Schools, the District added outdoor learning and gathering spaces.
- At Eisenhower School, the District added an outdoor learning and gathering space and updated playground equipment.

District 23 directed some of its ESSER money for needs like technology, improved ventilation, tutoring and summer learning. But when it came

time to decide how to use the ESSER III grants, the District wanted to identify unique ways to take advantage of the one-time funding opportunity. “We first evaluated our core priorities and needs, giving a lot of thought to how we could use the funds in a timely manner and in a way that would have immediate and long-term benefits for students,” says Amy McPartlin, assistant superintendent of finance and operations.

The District decided to focus on the outdoor spaces. McPartlin says administrators are incredibly pleased with that decision and with the response so far this school year. “Students and staff are already putting the new areas to use every day – teachers holding class, students working on group projects, our musical groups having concerts and more. Everyone wants to take advantage of these revitalized outdoor areas.”

Other work that took place in the schools over the summer involved completing renovations to the MacArthur Library and upgrading technology throughout the District, including the replacement of promethean boards with new projectors, whiteboards and Apple TVs.



MacArthur students put their revitalized courtyard to good use.



Eisenhower's new learning and gathering space.

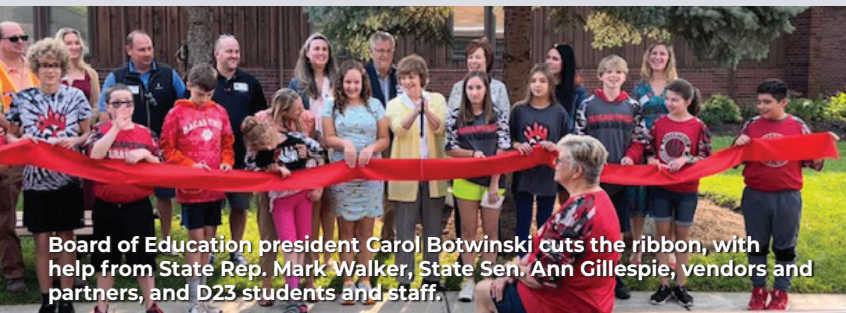
D23 DEDICATES STUDENT-CENTERED SPACES

On Sept. 15, the District held a ribbon-cutting event in the MacArthur Courtyard, with students, staff, School Board members, legislators, vendors and media on hand to dedicate the new space. Don Angelaccio, Ed.D., superintendent, highlighted the benefits of the courtyard and other outdoor areas that were enhanced and expanded over the summer.

Students in the Structured Adaptive Individualized Learning program (SAIL) – who helped design the sensory path, butterfly garden and planting boxes – shared what they like best about the new space and thanked everyone responsible

for the project. The students then helped cut a giant red ribbon to officially open the courtyard.

Amy Zaher, Ed.D., assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, thanked D23 staff for “rising to the occasion” throughout the pandemic and working hard to make personal connections with students, while helping them achieve academic growth. D23 administrators also thanked the partners who made the outdoor learning enhancements possible, including federal officials who provided the valuable ESSER funding.



Board of Education president Carol Botwinski cuts the ribbon, with help from State Rep. Mark Walker, State Sen. Ann Gillespie, vendors and partners, and D23 students and staff.



D23 students in the SAIL program share their gratitude for the new MacArthur courtyard.



Prospect Heights School District 23
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OUR SCHOOLS

MacArthur Middle School

Grades 6-8
Dr. Camron Nystrom, Principal
Ms. Stephanie Gage, Asst. Principal

Anne Sullivan Elementary

Grades 4-5
Ms. Traci Meziere, Principal

Betsy Ross Elementary

Grades 2-3
Dr. Craig Curtis, Principal

Eisenhower Elementary

Grades PreK-1
Dr. Luke Lambatos, Principal



The District is planning for the future and Building a Better D23! Learn more in this newsletter and at www.D23.org. Be sure to fill out the survey by the deadline of Nov. 30, using the website/return envelope provided in the mailing earlier this month. We want to hear from you! We thank all stakeholders for being part of this important process. Use this QR code to go directly to the D23 website:



FUN FOR ALL AT FAMILY FEST

Hundreds of students, families and staff enjoyed games, inflatables, food trucks and performances by student musicians at District 23's first-ever Family Fest on Oct. 21. The District was pleased with the turnout and enthusiasm for this inaugural, free event that was planned as a way to unite the community and celebrate students and staff being together again.