

THE PROUD 23 COMMUNITY Connection

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE PROSPECT HEIGHTS SCHOOL DISTRICT 23 COMMUNITY

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Dr. Amy Zaher
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for Curriculum and Instruction*

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A FEW WORDS FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

Welcome to the spring edition of your D23 newsletter, which is packed with news of the many exciting things happening throughout the District and our four schools. I hope you will take a few minutes to read these pages and get up to date on our upcoming referendum, curriculum enhancements, student progress, administrative changes and some of the exciting school news that makes us so **PROUD TO BE D23!**

You'll also find information about our efforts to create a roadmap for the future. I thank the parents, students, staff and community members who have participated in the Equity and Excellence Audit, the Safety and Security Audit, strategic planning and other processes this year. We couldn't do this

essential long-term planning without input from our many stakeholders.

It's no surprise there's so much positive momentum for D23 in the year 2023. It's kind of like our "Golden Year!" In January, we had fun kicking off this exciting time with a video from another famous #23 – Chicago Cubs legend Ryne Sandberg! You can find his special message for our community at www.D23.org. He did a great job of capturing some of the things that make our District such a special place.

As you probably know, there is an election on Tuesday, April 4, and the ballot will include a limiting tax-rate referendum for our District. We have held community information sessions and put out materials to educate voters about the ways that additional funding would benefit our schools and the community now and in the future. I encourage you to read the overview in this newsletter and the in-depth information at www.D23.org in the Building a Better D23 section. And please remember to vote on April 4!

Thank you, as always, for your support of our students!

Don Angelaccio, Ed.D.

Superintendent of Schools,
Prospect Heights School District 23

We love to tell our story! Stay informed and connected:

Go to <https://tinyurl.com/d23newsletter> and sign up to receive news and updates.



RAVE REVIEWS FOR SULLIVAN MUSICAL:

This year's Sullivan musical, "Frozen JR.," took place March 9 and 10, with daytime performances for students and an evening performance for families and fans. The production featured 54 fourth and fifth graders in the cast/crew and on set design. Some are pictured here, working hard at a rehearsal. Staff responsible for the musical were Karen Luehr and Jennifer Wessel (directors), Garth Anderson and Meghan Slowik (stage crew) and Jamie Gross (set design). The spring calendar is full of many other opportunities to showcase D23 fine arts talent – Band, Orchestra and Chorus concerts, plus the MacArthur Musical May 11 and 12.

CURRICULUM REVIEW

THE BIG REVEAL: D23 ROLLS OUT LONG-AWAITED NEW ELA CURRICULUM

District 23 schools are wrapping up the first year of implementing new English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum that better prepares elementary and middle school students for their high school years and beyond. The new materials are challenging, but students find the stories to be engaging, and their teachers are pleased with the many writing opportunities that are embedded into the lessons, according to Amy Zaher, Ed.D., assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction.

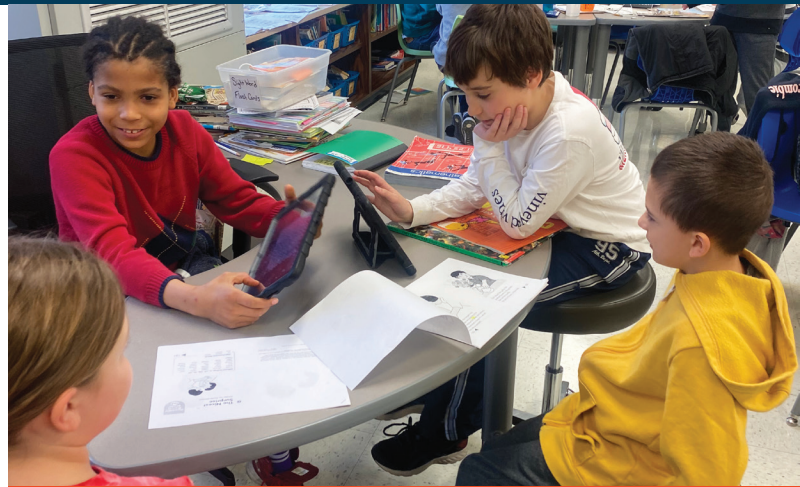
The ELA rollout is the culmination of an extensive adoption process. The Curriculum Committee reviewed and piloted several options and sought student and staff feedback over the past two years. One major goal was to find materials that provide strong foundational skills in younger grades, like phonics, because this early preparation is essential to future growth, Zaher says.

She says the pandemic delayed the ELA implementation, which provided more time to better learn how to implement an enhanced blended learning (combining online lessons with paper) model. Now, the new ELA materials support learning within the classroom walls and beyond.

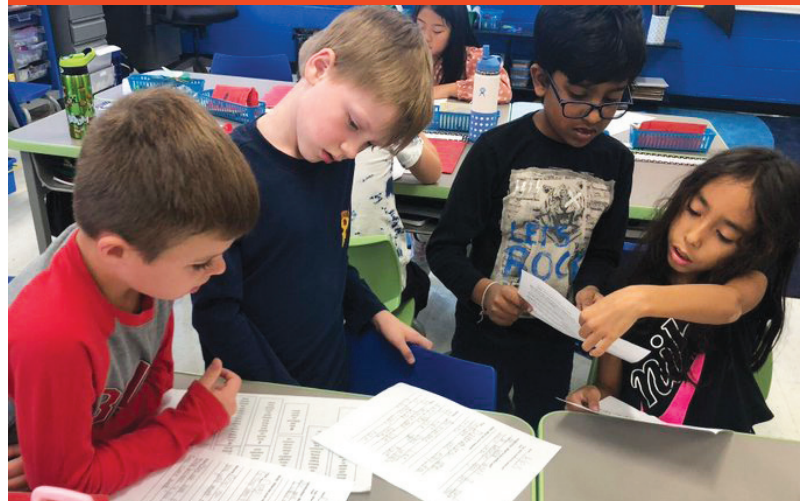
The rollout also has included multiple professional development opportunities for staff, as well as setting aside collaboration time so they can plan together.

The new materials are fully aligned with the Illinois Learning Standards in ELA, which are more rigorous than previous standards. In spite of the more difficult material, fall/winter assessments showed that students are “right on track,” according to Zaher. “Sometimes you expect an implementation dip, but we did not see that, which shows that our teachers and staff are working hard to help students find their way and get the most out of the new materials.”

The Curriculum Committee has now turned its attention to



Sullivan fifth graders (above) and Ross second graders (below) work together on their ELA lessons that are part of the more rigorous and engaging new curriculum.



social studies. Members are reviewing the learning standards and researching and piloting instructional materials that would be a good fit, with the goals of making a selection by June and beginning the implementation next school year.

STUDENTS SURPASS EXPECTATIONS, SHOW GROWTH IN SPITE OF TOUGH TIMES

All four District 23 schools are seeing positive performance and growth in assessments over the past year, surpassing even pre-pandemic scores in some areas. Administrators say the results indicate the schools were on good footing during the pandemic, which means they can now continue to move forward without having to play catchup.

“We did not lose ground over the past few years, like many other districts, and we’ve been able to keep our positive momentum going this year,” says Amy

Zaher, Ed.D., assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction. “That’s something to really be proud of. The systems we had in place and all the hard work of students and staff made these positive results possible.”

- **I-Ready Diagnostics:** In ELA and math this fall and winter, all four schools have achieved high performance/high growth, the highest level of achievement. ELA scores were better than pre-2020, and math was similar. I-Ready is a benchmark assessment given

three times a year, and it creates individualized learning paths based on each student’s performance.

- **IAR (Illinois Assessment of Readiness):** In the test given last spring and reported in fall 2022, the District’s students exceeded the state average in math and scored just one percentage point under the state average in ELA. Students will take the IAR again this March, and Zaher says the District expects to see higher ELA scores now that the new curriculum has been implemented.

YOUR VOICE MATTERS!

COMMUNITY INPUT HAS BEEN ESSENTIAL AS D23 CREATES ROADMAP FOR THE FUTURE

This year, District 23 is working on several projects that will shape learning experiences and outcomes for students of today and well into the future. The District has spent the past several months conducting Equity and Excellence and Safety and Security Audits and preparing a new Strategic Plan. When the work is finished, the community will have a detailed roadmap for the future of its school district.

The intensive planning requires input from the District's stakeholders, according to Don Angelaccio, Ed.D., superintendent. Students, families, staff and community members have participated in online surveys and focus groups, sharing their thoughts about "what is working well and where we can do better," he says. "We value everyone's insight as we make these important decisions that impact the entire community."

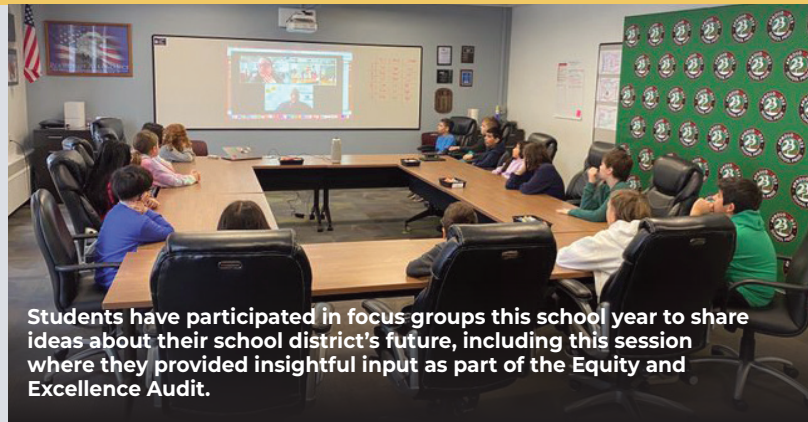
Here is an update on the projects and processes where "your voice matters" most (learn more about the tax referendum and Building a Better D23 on P. 5):

EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE AUDIT

- The Equity and Excellence Audit will help the District continue to grow as a welcoming and inclusive school community. The goals are to make sure everyone is committed to providing an excellent education for every student, making families feel welcome and valued, seeking parent feedback, encouraging students to respect and interact with peers from different backgrounds, and ensuring students feel physically and emotionally safe at school and have a sense of belonging.
- Students in grades four to eight, parents and staff took a survey in January, and Administration presented results to the Board of Education on March 8. That report will be placed on the District website. Findings from the audit will be incorporated into the Strategic Plan, to ensure that programming and processes allow for access, opportunity and success for every student.

SAFETY AND SECURITY AUDIT

- In the summer and fall, administrators, staff, local first responders, parents and students conducted a Safety and Security Audit and made recommendations to enhance procedures, policies and practices aimed at keeping District buildings as safe as possible. The team addressed signage, sight lines, exterior doors, parking lot configuration and security cameras, and made recommendations to the Board. The District is now working to incorporate specific action items and implementation deadlines into the Strategic Plan.



Students have participated in focus groups this school year to share ideas about their school district's future, including this session where they provided insightful input as part of the Equity and Excellence Audit.

"WE VALUE EVERYONE'S INSIGHT AS WE MAKE THESE IMPORTANT DECISIONS THAT IMPACT THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY."

- Short-term actions include the implementation of a "Safe at School" confidential reporting system, new cybersecurity practices and increasing the number of lunch supervisors. Long-term actions include the development of revised Emergency Response Protocols and visitor screening procedures, as well as investigating a shared School Resource Officer position for the District and the Prospect Heights Police Department. The audit also looked at curriculum needs,

recommending that the District maintain its cycle of social-emotional curriculum review and mapping and aligning expectations for being "Respectful, Responsible and Safe."

STRATEGIC PLAN

- The current Strategic Plan goes through 2023, so the District has been developing a new plan that sets a course of action and direction and will guide decision making and planning for the years to come. The plan's strategic goals and objectives will incorporate information and data gathered from the Equity and Excellence and Safety and Security Audits.
- The District is conducting a survey (see below) and focus groups to give parents and the community another opportunity to be part of identifying priorities and creating a new vision for the future.
- The final Strategic Plan will be presented to the Board of Education in May or June and will then be placed on the District website.

MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD

Community members are encouraged to use this QR code to take a brief, anonymous survey as the District develops the new Strategic Plan. Your thoughts about the strengths and needs of YOUR SCHOOL DISTRICT are a critical part of this process. We will incorporate findings from the survey into the final plan. Thank you for being part of this collaborative effort.





A MYSTERY THAT ROSS READERS CAN'T WAIT TO SOLVE

What could be more exciting for a second or third grader than an unexpected guest showing up in class to read a favorite book – especially if that person happens to be your own family member?

With Betsy Ross School's new Mystery Reader program, teachers coordinate a reading schedule with families in advance, keeping each reader's identity a secret from the class until the special guest walks through the door. Second-grade teacher Julie Murray

says that whenever there's a Mystery Reader coming in, students speculate throughout the day, which adds to the excitement. Before each guest enters the room, the class plays a guessing game to try to figure out who that day's reader might be, according to third-grade teacher Angie Levato. "Students have absolutely loved this addition to our school year," she says. Second-grade teacher Rachel Schoeny adds that when a student sees his or her

own special person, "the look on their face is priceless."

The popular program is part of the school's effort to find creative ways to get more parents involved, according to principal Craig Curtis, Ed.D. "We are giving parents an opportunity to come into school and support their child's education. At the same time, students get to be thrilled by a new story from a new reader, who is a surprise to them up until the very last moment. You can't beat that."



(Left to right) Ellie visits with her dad on his day to be Mystery Reader for Stella Prosek's class. Teacher Julie Murray's sons share one of their favorite childhood books with their mom's class. Thatcher's mom reads to Rachel Schoeny's students.

'FRIENDSHIPS FLOURISH' IN MACARTHUR'S SIGN LANGUAGE CLUB

A popular after-school club at MacArthur enhances the school's welcoming and inclusive atmosphere by bridging the gap between hearing students and those who are Deaf or hard of hearing (DHH). ASL (American Sign Language) Club meets weekly from January through March. Hearing students come together with peers who are Deaf or hard of hearing to learn about the variety of hearing losses and amplifications, learn the ASL alphabet and theme-based vocabulary like animals or food, and play games based on their growing knowledge of ASL.

"Having a club like this is important because our school culture is like a family, and we want to make sure everyone is included," says teacher Kim Salyards, who teaches the DHH program that is housed at MacArthur. The program serves students residing in member districts of Northwest Suburban Special Education Organization (NSSEO), providing academic, language, listening and speech instruction.

DHH students at MacArthur are included in classes with their peers, and also participate in many clubs and sports. About 10 years ago, it became apparent that there was a need for a club that could teach some basic ASL concepts, while helping to connect DHH students with their classmates and staff. So Salyards, a former MacArthur student who was born in a Deaf family and learned ASL as her first language, started the club for sixth

through eighth graders. She says it has been going strong ever since.

This year, there are 20 students participating in ASL Club. Salyards says that in addition to learning important lessons, students are socially bonding with each other. "Friendships flourish with the help of ASL Club," she says, adding that the club also can potentially inspire students to explore a career as an ASL interpreter or deaf education teacher.



RESIDENTS TO VOTE ON THE DISTRICT'S FUTURE ON APRIL 4

In January, the District 23 Board of Education approved a resolution to place a limiting-rate tax referendum on the ballot in the election on Tuesday, April 4, 2023. This decision came after a multi-phase community engagement process. "The extensive input gathered over the past year helped us ensure we are following the community's expectations for continuous improvement and creating opportunities for all students to grow," says Don Angelaccio, Ed.D., superintendent.

If the referendum passes, the additional funding would enable D23 to meet high-priority facility and programming needs at all four schools, including:

- **Adding new space and staffing at Eisenhower School to allow all eligible students to participate in full-day kindergarten and early childhood programs.** Eisenhower is at capacity and unable to serve 35% of pre-k and kindergarten students who live in D23 boundaries. Most peer districts already have full-day kindergarten.
- **Enhancing safety and security,** including the replacement of doors and windows and the installation of additional security cameras.
- **Addressing critical repairs and maintenance,** to extend the life of buildings, improve energy efficiency and reduce costly emergency repairs.
- **Supporting community needs and meeting demand for recreational space** (from the park districts, scouting groups and others).

The estimated cost of the proposed improvements is \$24 million. The financing plan calls for \$4 million to be funded with non-referendum dollars and the rest by tax revenue from



a successful referendum. Property taxes are the main revenue source for District 23, and there are low fund balances (cash on hand), which is why a referendum is necessary to meet the urgent needs and priorities.

"Compared to our seven peer districts, we have the third lowest tax rate at 3.416%, and the community has not approved a referendum since 1987, 35 years ago," Angelaccio says. "The District has been a responsible steward of taxpayer resources."

To learn more, visit www.D23.org and click on the Building a Better D23 section.

CALCULATE YOUR TAX IMPACT

The ballot will ask voters if the limiting rate should be increased by 0.48%. What does this mean for individual taxpayers?

- The estimated annual impact is \$44.65 per \$1,000 of taxes paid, or approximately \$486 for a home with a fair market value of \$350,000.
- Voters can use the simple tax calculator at www.D23.org to determine the anticipated property tax impact for their home.

ROSS PRINCIPAL CURTIS TO BECOME ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT

District 23 has named Craig Curtis, Ed.D., principal of Betsy Ross School, as the next assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction, effective July 1. Don Angelaccio, Ed.D., superintendent, says Curtis is respected throughout the District and is well prepared for the new role, given that he has served as a

successful principal, assistant principal and elementary education teacher.

"Dr. Curtis has proven his leadership abilities and dedication to the equity of all students by cultivating a positive school culture, facilitating strong professional development and developing programs that are responsive to student needs."

Curtis has served as principal of Ross for 11 years. Prior to that, he was an assistant principal in North Berwyn School District 98 for two years, and a teacher for eight years before that. He holds a bachelor's degree in elementary education and a master's and doctorate in educational leadership.

"It has been a true privilege serving as principal of Betsy Ross, as I have built many amazing relationships throughout the District," Curtis says. "I look forward to being part of the stellar administrative team and working to help all the District's students grow as learners, individuals and citizens."

Angelaccio thanks the interview committee that led the search for a new assistant superintendent. Curtis replaces Amy Zaher, Ed.D., who has taken a superintendent position in another district. He will work with the administrative team this spring to ensure a smooth transition. District 23 has started the process of finding a new principal for Ross.





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

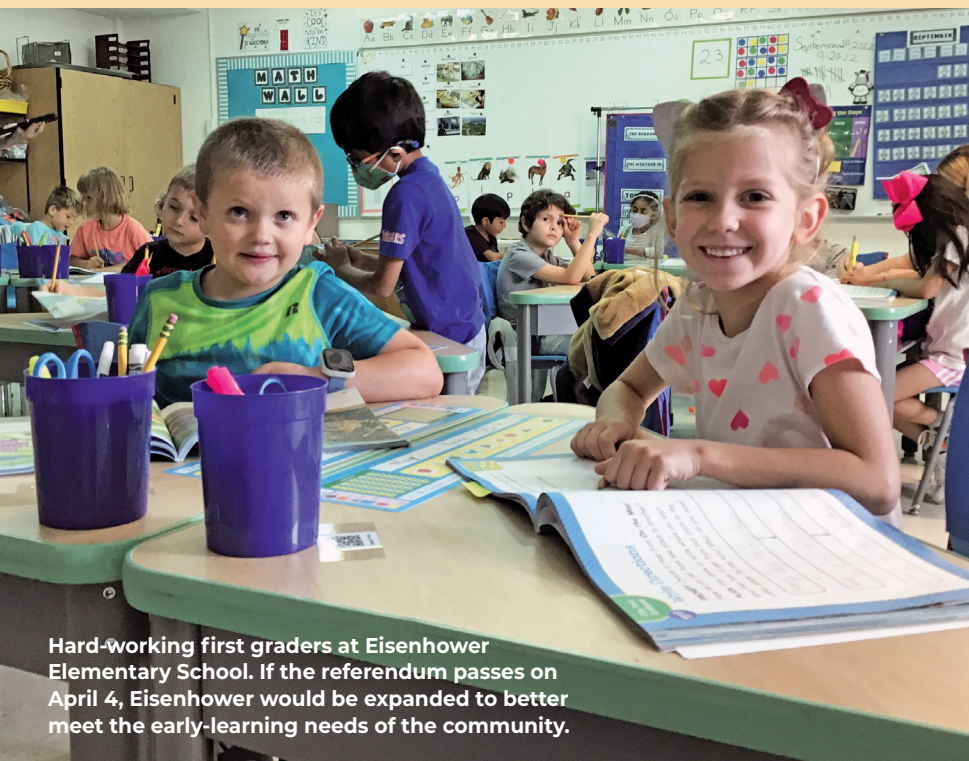
Betsy Ross Elementary

Grades 2-3
Dr. Craig Curtis, Principal

Eisenhower Elementary

Grades PreK-1
Dr. Luke Lambatos, Principal

BUILDING A BETTER D23



Hard-working first graders at Eisenhower Elementary School. If the referendum passes on April 4, Eisenhower would be expanded to better meet the early-learning needs of the community.

ARE YOU READY TO CAST YOUR VOTE?

The ballot in the upcoming Consolidated Election will include a tax referendum for District 23. Learn more on P. 5 of this newsletter and by scanning this QR code to go to the Building a Better D23 website. The site outlines the urgent facility and programming needs and includes a link to the Cook County Clerk, where voters can find everything they need to know about:

- Early voting (**March 20-April 3**)
- Voting by mail (ballots must be postmarked by election day)
- Election day voting on **Tuesday, April 4**
- Designated polling place locations
- Registering to vote on election day (for those who are not already registered)

