

# THE PROUD 23 COMMUNITY Connection

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE PROSPECT HEIGHTS SCHOOL DISTRICT 23 COMMUNITY

## ADMINISTRATION

Dr. Don Angelaccio  
*Superintendent*

Amy McPartlin  
*Asst. Superintendent  
for Finance and Operations*

Dr. Chrys Sroka  
*Asst. Superintendent  
for Student Services*

Dr. Amy Zaher  
*Asst. Superintendent  
for Curriculum and Instruction*

## BOARD OF EDUCATION

Carol Botwinski  
*President*

Kevin Novak  
*Vice President*

Mari-Lynn Peters  
*Secretary*

Jim Bednar

Brian Greidanus

Becky McClaney

Matt Smith

[www.d23.org](http://www.d23.org)

Follow us on Facebook  
and Twitter, @PHSD23.



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

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



## A FEW WORDS FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

The 2021-2022 school year is off to a great start! All of us in the District 23 community are thrilled to be back in the schools full time. There are exciting things going on in all four buildings, as you'll read in this newsletter – the fall 2021 edition of the District 23 Community Connection. Whether you have children in our schools or not, I hope you'll take a few minutes to review it, so you can get up to date on our curriculum, finances, accomplishments and the work that goes on at MacArthur, Anne Sullivan, Betsy Ross and Eisenhower Schools every day.

I am proud of our staff, students and families for persevering through the uncertainty and changes last year. We made the most of things, and students continued to learn and make great progress. This year is much different. We're back with a "new normal," thanks to mitigations that are keeping us safe and in school. (Read more on Page 5.)

**"I AM PROUD OF OUR STAFF, STUDENTS AND FAMILIES FOR PERSEVERING THROUGH THE UNCERTAINTY AND CHANGES LAST YEAR."**

I've enjoyed being able to spend more time with students and staff in the schools this fall. There's nothing better than seeing their enthusiasm firsthand. This includes attending MacArthur cross country meets (pictured on this page), serving as a guest reader, participating in book talks, taking part in staff professional development, meeting families at Parent Nights – even being a substitute teacher in a middle school English Language Arts class. (Don't worry, I promised the kids I'll keep my day job!)

I'm also glad that my administrative team and I have been able to get back to the traditional work of running the District, which includes ensuring that we are acting on our strategic plan and vision for the future. This summer, we completed necessary roofing and HVAC work at the schools. We are now planning the next enhancements to our facilities and programs, including the potential expansion of Early Childhood and kindergarten programs. We are also determining how we will spend our federal ESSER (Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief) money to upgrade outdoor learning spaces, audio visual technology and libraries.

I hope you enjoy our fall newsletter. The stories here are just a few of the many reasons we are **PROUD TO BE D23!**

**Don Angelaccio Ed.D.**

Superintendent of Schools,  
Prospect Heights School District 23



Amy Zaher, Ed.D.

District 23's English Language Arts (ELA) Curriculum Committee is working to implement new instructional materials that better prepare students as they journey throughout elementary and middle school, as well as high school and beyond. The goal is to refine instructional practices and improve student achievement in areas such as reading, writing and foundational skills like phonics, grammar, handwriting and more, according to Amy Zaher, Ed.D., assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction

The Curriculum Committee has been working its way through an extensive adoption process for the past two years, including refreshing everyone's knowledge of the state standards to ensure there is an understanding of the rigor that the standards require. The committee is finding a variety of curriculum options that most effectively meet the standards and student needs, then piloting some lessons to get feedback from students. The goal is to select a new curriculum by this spring, so that professional development and teachers' guides can be delivered before summer break. The curriculum would be rolled out at the beginning of the 2022-2023 school year.

The curriculum adoption process consists of ensuring that all grade and ability levels are represented as new materials are researched and tested, according to Zaher. She says the current ELA Standards include the following requirements:

**COMPLEXITY:** Practice regularly with complex text and its academic language.

**EVIDENCE:** Ground reading, writing and speaking in evidence from the text, both literary and informational.

**KNOWLEDGE:** Build knowledge through content-rich nonfiction.

Using these requirements as a guide, the Curriculum Committee is evaluating materials using criteria such as the promotion of cultural diversity, the use of technology and the incorporation of tools for differentiating instruction.

"We still have a lot of work to accomplish this school year, but it is work worth doing," Zaher says. "The data we are collecting will help us make informed decisions and ensure our new ELA materials help students meet expectations and prepare for the future."

## FINANCIAL REVIEW

### FY22 TO BRING A BALANCED BUDGET, BUILDING UPDATES AND IMPROVED LEARNING SPACES

District 23 finished the year with an overall surplus in Operating Funds and in September, passed a balanced budget for Fiscal Year 2022. "We are proud that we continue to have a balanced budget during these challenging financial times when school districts are facing unexpected costs related to the pandemic," says Amy McPartlin, assistant superintendent of finance and operations. "Through tighter budgeting and careful monitoring of expenditures and revenues, we've been able to move forward with important projects and avoid making program cuts that would directly impact students."

The District completed some long-planned capital projects over the past summer. The projects, which ensure the buildings are safe and up to date, included HVAC retrofit work at Anne Sullivan and Betsy Ross Schools and phase one roofing work at

MacArthur Middle School. Moving into the summer of 2022, the District has scheduled capital projects that include:

- Roofing replacements at MacArthur (phase 2) and Anne Sullivan.
- HVAC retrofit work at MacArthur.
- Continued upgrades to larger student spaces, with furniture replacements and audiovisual enhancements at all four schools, including exciting improvements in the MacArthur library.

Some of these projects will be paid for with federal funding from the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) program, which is intended to:

- Help school districts safely reopen.
- Address the impact of COVID-19 on students.

McPartlin says District 23 has received approval for just over \$1 million in ESSER

III funding and is thoughtfully evaluating how to best allocate the money for the areas listed in the graphic below.

"We understand this is a unique and limited opportunity. We want to make the most of it, with projects that support student learning and have long-term benefits for our community," she says.

#### DISTRICT 23 ESSER – EXPENDITURE CATEGORIES:

PERSONNEL

TECHNOLOGY

SPACE MODIFICATION

CURRICULUM/  
PROGRAMMING

MITIGATION SUPPLIES –  
EQUIPMENT



## MIDDLE SCHOOLERS EMBRACE RETURN OF CLUBS, MUSIC AND SPORTS

Middle school presents an opportunity for students to explore their interests and passions – or find them – through extracurricular activities. That’s why MacArthur has always provided a wide range of options that appeal to its large and diverse student body. This fall, with everyone back in the building, the school has been pleased to bring these opportunities back, and students are embracing the chance to get involved.

MacArthur offered some extracurriculars last year, including shortened basketball and volleyball seasons and virtual clubs. But this year the school has returned to a full menu of activities, including basketball intramurals and cross country; band, orchestra and chorus; a robotics team; and clubs devoted to yearbook, newspaper, art and innovation, to name a few.

The response? “More than ever, kids want to be part of something,” according to principal Camron Nystrom, Ed.D. “The limitations of last year have contributed to the huge interest we’re now seeing.”

MacArthur tries to capture many interests – including sports, writing, STEM, the arts and fitness – and design opportunities that complement the work done during the school day. It’s part of serving “the whole child,” which is important when students are trying to figure out who they are, who they want to be. “They need more than class time to do that,” Nystrom says, adding that extracurricular involvement also helps students connect with each other, as well as with adults they can trust. Another benefit is many students discover interests in middle school that they carry with them into high school and college, even careers.



MacArthur students have been excited about the return of extracurriculars, including cross country, which had one of its largest teams this fall – about 85 kids!

## ROSS GARDEN AND GREEN THUMB CLUB BRING SCIENCE LESSONS TO LIFE

Young minds are not the only things growing and blossoming at Betsy Ross School. There’s also a bountiful crop of fruits and vegetables tucked in a courtyard near the playground, thanks to the hard work of the Bulldog Green Thumb Club.

Second- and third-grade classes that are part of the club grow seedlings in their classrooms in late spring, then plant them in the Ross Garden just before school lets out for the summer. Harvesting takes place in the fall.

“Our goal is for kids to be involved in all the stages of growth, and even taste some of what we produce,” says third-grade teacher Angie Levato, who leads the club and organizes the activities, along with second-grade teacher Stella Geller. They invite other teachers to get their students involved. There are usually up to 12 different classrooms helping with the garden and taking part in other Green Thumb Club activities.

“This club is not only an exciting opportunity for students, but it reinforces our science curriculum for second and third graders, which includes topics like the study of the plant life cycle, traits of plants, seeds and roots,” says principal Craig Curtis. “They are able to see the processes they study coming to life right in their own garden.”

Levato says the Ross Garden has produced tomatoes, peppers, carrots, cucumbers, squash, pumpkins, potatoes,

asparagus, herbs – even some flowers. A highlight is when students do “taste tests” in their classrooms after the harvest. Sometimes they even get to bring vegetables home to try with their families.

Curtis says the Ross Garden adds “a touch of community and family engagement” to the school. “Not only does it bring classrooms together toward a common initiative, but it also brings families into the picture. Each summer, families can volunteer to take care of the garden for a week-long span. What a great way to build community while also showing one of the school’s core character traits of responsibility.”



Students prepare to plant fruits and vegetables in the Ross Garden.



## 'WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER' – SEL CURRICULUM TEACHES SKILLS FOR LIFE

During the formative years of elementary and middle school, students are developing behaviors and interpersonal skills they will draw upon throughout their lives – such as building positive relationships and managing their emotions and stress. That's why District 23 has prioritized social-emotional learning (SEL) and is launching a new, innovative curriculum called Second Step this school year.

Second Step is a comprehensive SEL program that starts with simple lessons in pre-k and builds on those learnings as students progress all the way through eighth grade. "We're now using the same language across the District, in structured activities as well as learning that is woven throughout the day," says Eisenhower School principal Luke Lambatos, who served on the curriculum selection committee, along with other administrators and teacher representatives from every grade.

He says the committee researched several options and chose Second Step because "it is steeped in research and is a well-crafted program that schools can build on year to year." The curriculum includes units such as developing a growth mindset and goal setting, emotion management, empathy and kindness, and problem solving. There's also a bullying-prevention program.



For the District's youngest students at Eisenhower, many of the Second Step lessons are covered during daily "morning meetings" (pictured above), when teachers discuss behavior expectations and check in with how children are feeling that day. Lambatos says he's already seeing great results in pre-k and first grade, including richer classroom discussions and staff members using new tools to help support students and teach important skills.

Lambatos says having a strong SEL curriculum supports academics and is especially important as children are dealing with the mental health impact of the pandemic. "We want to have a positive learning environment where everyone feels safe and secure, ready to learn and able to process the outside stressors in our world," he says, adding that SEL enhances the school community and emphasizes that "we're all in this together, whether it's a pandemic or any other challenge."

## FROM 20-BOOK BINGO TO 40-BOOK CHALLENGE, SULLIVAN BUILDS LIFELONG READERS

Anne Sullivan School has found a fun and creative way to expand students' reading horizons and get them to explore new and different genres – the Principal's 40-Book Challenge. The program is part of the school's effort to enhance literacy during the crucial fourth- and fifth-grade years, when it's important to foster a love for reading that can last a lifetime.

All students are challenged to read 40 books throughout the year, spanning a variety of genres. They submit a recorded book talk or online comprehension assessment for each book. At the end of the year, Sullivan holds a celebration for everyone who has made it to 40.

Teachers publicly celebrate when their students reach the milestones of 10, 20, 30 and 40 books. They also get recognized during weekly schoolwide announcements by principal Traci Meziere. "They love the recognition, and it spurs interest," says fifth-grade teacher Laurie Travis. "They start fifth grade knowing about the program and excited to begin reading. We're only a couple months into the year, and many kids have already read 15 or 20 books. They are eating it up."

"This is one of many ways we strive to build a culture of readers," Meziere says, pointing to 20 Book Bingo for fourth graders as another example. She

**"WE'RE ONLY A COUPLE MONTHS INTO THE YEAR, AND MANY KIDS HAVE ALREADY READ 15 OR 20 BOOKS. THEY ARE EATING IT UP."**

says the school also enjoys a strong partnership with the Prospect Heights Public Library, with librarians regularly presenting to staff and students and hosting field trips.

This fall, Sullivan's library/media specialist Betsy Yager set up a "book tasting" for staff. They explored "menus" that featured several genres, then sampled a variety of books and reserved the ones they were interested in for their classrooms.

"Our students are at an age where teachers have a big influence on them. So the adults in the building really model a love of reading," Meziere says. "Our goal at this grade level is to keep and grow their interest, exposing them to a lot of variety, so they become lifelong readers."





# ACKNOWLEDGE. ADJUST. ADVANCE.

## BACK-TO-SCHOOL BLUEPRINT GUIDES SUCCESSFUL RETURN TO THE BUILDINGS

All four District 23 schools returned to a full in-person model of instruction for the 2021-2022 school year, with COVID-19 mitigation strategies in place to maintain safe and healthy learning environments. Superintendent Don Angelaccio, Ed.D., says the strategies are working, and there has been a smooth transition to the “new normal” in the school buildings.

“Our COVID cases have been very low, less than 2 percent of our population. This is the result of a collaborative effort, with everyone doing their part and living up to their responsibility,” he says.

Camron Nystrom, Ed.D., principal of MacArthur Middle School, agrees that staff, students and parents/guardians have been adaptable and supportive of adjustments to the school day and extracurricular activities. “There’s an energy of doing whatever it takes so we can continue to safely come together as a school community.”

District 23’s COVID-19 mitigations include:

- Masking on buses and while inside the schools, other than during lunch and outdoor recess.
- Maintaining three to six feet of distance, per Illinois Department of Public Health and Centers for Disease Control guidance, except for instances such as passing periods.
- Prioritizing regular cleaning and disinfection in the schools.

In addition, District 23 has launched optional weekly COVID-19 screening for students and staff, utilizing the non-invasive SHIELD Illinois saliva-based test. The highly effective test identifies pre-symptomatic and asymptomatic staff and students. District 23 schools are among the more than 1,200 in Illinois that are utilizing SHIELD Illinois. “We believe this will reduce the spread in our schools and help us sustain in-person learning,” Angelaccio says, adding that the testing takes only a couple minutes and causes minimal disruption to the school day.

Now that students are back, District administrators see some unexpected benefits that have occurred since March 2020, such as improved technological capabilities. For example, the schools have achieved an effective balance between digital and in-person instruction, and streaming technology is being applied more frequently to communicate with and reach broader audiences (for example, School Board meetings and Parent Nights).

Angelaccio says he’s also pleased to see the resilience of the District 23 community. “These are still changing and uncertain times, but it’s gratifying to know we can rally together to support our students’ academic and social growth and keep our community safe,” he says. “I am confident we will continue to meet whatever challenges come our way.”

District 23’s COVID-19 mitigation strategies are outlined in the Acknowledge. Adapt. Advance. Back-to-School Blueprint, which can be found by scanning this QR code:



Eisenhower School students were eager to get back to school on the first day.





**Prospect Heights School District 23**  
700 N. Schoenbeck Rd.  
Prospect Heights, IL 60070

Non-Profit  
Organization  
U.S. Postage Paid  
Permit No. \_\_\_  
Prospect Hts., IL

## OUR SCHOOLS

### MacArthur Middle School

Grades 6-8  
Dr. Camron Nystrom, Principal  
Mr. Chris Alms, 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

# WE'RE PROUD TO BE D23

1,472 ENROLLMENT



2 EXEMPLARY SCHOOLS  
2 COMMENDABLE SCHOOLS  
(Illinois Report Card)



91%  
PARENT  
SATISFACTION

ELEMENTARY STUDENTS PER TEACHER:

17:1 D23      17:1 STATE AVERAGE



2 OUT OF 3  
TEACHERS WITH  
ADVANCED DEGREES



\$15,000  
D23 PER-PUPIL SPEND

\$14,057  
STATE PER-PUPIL SPEND



97%  
STUDENT ATTENDANCE RATE

