

**Minutes of Gurnee School District 56
Board of Education Meeting
August 26, 2026**

The following Board members were in attendance: Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Mandi Florip (via telephone), Germain Castellanos, and Cesar Garcia.

Also in attendance:

Luis Correa, Superintendent
Martin Da Costa, Director of Business | CSBO
Eric Esteban, Director of Technology
Luis West, Director of Curriculum & Instruction
Sean Smith, Director of Facilities & Grounds
Rachel Solomon, Director of Pupil Services
Miriam Torres, Multilingual & Assessment Coordinator
Principals: Dominique Geocariss, Jennifer Glickley, Sara Rosheger, and Allison Waller
Aurora Orozco, Board Clerk

Board President Pos called the regular meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. and asked that everyone join him in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

Before the start of the board meeting, Mrs. Rosheger, Mrs. Waller, Mrs. Glickley, and Mrs. Geocariss introduced the new staff members to the Board of Education and the public, presenting the new hires for their respective Gurnee School District 56 buildings.

Spaulding: Carly Henclewski, Alexis Imhof, Noeli Limon Alonso, Gretchen Maier, Mandi McDonald, and Mary Moorhead.

Prairie Trail: Jennifer Jasinski, Elizabeth Kempf, Ariana Pestano-Holt, Jennifer Spiegel, and Madelin Zizzo.

River Trail: Jennifer Barrera, Beatrice Bedolla, Gina Carcione, Anaid Hernandez Sanchez, Amy Jenkins, Cori Leal, Stephanie Ocampo, and Katie Seiver.

Viking: Theresa Carpentier, Katarzyna Drake, and Emily Jacobs.

Following the introductions, Board President Pos warmly welcomed all new staff members to Gurnee School District 56.

Board Member Blockinger made a motion with a second from Board Member Pahl to accept the minutes from the regular meeting on July 22, 2026, as presented. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, and Mandi Florip (via telephone).

The regular August 26, 2026, Treasurer's Report identified cash and investments of \$30,687,927.06. The Revenue Report identified receipts of \$ 1,822,345.20, and the Expenditure Report identified expenses totaling \$3,886,412.89. The cash balance in the Activity Fund for July was \$114,129.33. The Financial Reports, plus the Revised July (\$2,488,421.59) and Regular August (\$3,448,747.87) Bills for Payment Reports, were approved on a motion by Board President Pos and seconded by Board Member Blockinger. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, and Mandi Florip (via telephone).

Dr. Correa requested that each building principal provide the Board of Education with highlights that had occurred at their building since the previous Board of Education meeting. This included pictures from:

Viking Middle School: Viking began the school year with an expectations and review assembly focused on fun and the school's core values. Students competed in games and worked together in teams during a marshmallow relay race. Throughout the year, Viking will emphasize District 56's four core values in every interaction with students: being safe, respectful, responsible, and productive. These values will also guide conversations when students need support redirecting their behavior. Staff took their annual photo and were joined by six new SEDOL staff members. The SEDOL classrooms are staffed by Candy Takis and Erin Levitete, along with four paraprofessionals who support the students. Viking is excited about this new partnership.

River Trail School: River Trail kicked off the school year with PBIS training and several safety activities, including a bus evacuation drill on the first day. Mrs. Johnson joined in the fun by pretending to drive one of the buses—she is always ready with a great outfit! The kindergarten students had a wonderful first day of school, and most students had a very positive start to the year. During PBIS training, students reviewed expectations for different areas of the school, including the lunchroom, playground, and office. The training concluded with a PBIS assembly, where members of last year's choir performed for the students. Staff also participated in Institute Day activities before welcoming students back.

Prairie Trail: Prairie Trail began the school year with several fun team-building activities. Students in Ms. Groom's and Ms. Kempf's classes worked together and began building positive classroom relationships. Ms. Kempf incorporated classroom circles on the first day as part of Prairie Trail's ongoing SEL goal. Mrs. Jasinski also used creative activities that allowed students to get to know their classmates. Prairie Trail had the pleasure of hosting Kagan training. Staff members in a variety of roles were actively engaged, interacting with one another and building their professional capacity. The school is especially proud that paraprofessionals participated in the training as they continue developing as educators and potential future teachers. Prairie Trail also welcomed a student teacher, Mr. K, and four resource teachers. Two classroom teachers transitioned into resource positions this year. The school is excited that they already know the students well and are embracing their new roles.

Spaulding School: On August 11, Spaulding welcomed Dr. Anissa Baker-Busby, a Solution Tree consultant, who worked with the Building Leadership Team using content from her book, *Highly Effective Teams*. The team explored how it can serve as a guiding coalition and continue advancing Spaulding's work as a professional learning community. Spaulding also hosted a Kagan workshop for kindergarten through second-grade teachers from Spaulding and River Trail. Teachers learned how to implement structures that promote cooperative learning in their classrooms. Students and staff enjoyed a wonderful start to the school year. Mrs. McDonald welcomed her first-grade students, Mrs. Green worked with students in the early childhood special education classroom, and students in the structured learning classroom participated in first-day activities. Ms. Anzalone's kindergarten students also enjoyed a "magic Play-Doh" activity—and the magic even worked when the principal stopped by!

Dr. Lisa West presented highlights from the three-day New Educator Orientation, which included onboarding activities, a District bus tour, technology setup, coaching sessions, and opportunities to build connections with colleagues. She also shared that K–2 educators completed SuperKids literacy training and that Kagan training, held on August 18, received an overall rating of 4.6 out of 5. Staff described the training as engaging, practical, and immediately useful in the classroom.

Dr. Luis Correa presented highlights from District 56's participation in the Gurnee Days Parade. The event had a great turnout, and the district distributed 12 bags of candy.

Eric Esteban presented photos of teachers distributing the newly approved Chromebooks to middle school students on Friday and Monday. Students were excited about transitioning from iPads to Chromebooks.

At this time, Dr. Correa requested that each administrator report on department projects/tasks that they were currently focused on:

Business/HR: Mr. Da Costa reported that benefits presentations were held for new staff, who have 30 days from their start date to complete enrollment. He also shared that the annual staff wellness event is being coordinated for employees enrolled in District insurance. The event will offer free wellness screenings and optional flu shots to support preventive care.

Curriculum & Instruction: Dr. Lisa West shared highlights from the successful three-day New Educator Orientation, which included onboarding activities, a District bus tour, and opportunities for new educators to build connections with their cohort. Dr. West also reported that K–2 SuperKids literacy training at River Trail and Spaulding received positive feedback. Kagan training, held on August 18, received an overall rating of 4.6 out of 5 and was described by staff as engaging and practical for immediate classroom use.

Pupil Service/Special Education: Mrs. Rachel Solomon reported that the special education grant was accepted by ISBE on its first submission. Cardiac Emergency Response Team training was completed at all schools, and the department participated in the Gurnee Police Department safety event. Training was also provided for new special education staff and the new Viking classrooms.

Multilingual and Assessment: Mrs. Miriam Torres reported that the Multilingual Department is preparing for its first assessment window, placing newly registered students, and coordinating with the Boys & Girls Club. A total of 132 students are registered.

Maintenance & Facilities: Mr. Mendez reported that summer cleaning was completed successfully, including assembling more than 100 pieces of furniture and changing 500 locker combinations. Following a major storm, crews and contractors removed four fallen trees and numerous branches, repaired sign damage at Spaulding, and resolved minor flooding at Prairie Trail. Additional work included gutter and roof repairs, HVAC preventive maintenance, filter changes, exhaust system improvements, door repairs and replacements, and painting throughout the schools. The Prairie Trail kitchen project continues despite weather delays, with crews installing mechanical equipment, plumbing, and water heaters while completing IEPA requirements for water and sewer connections.

Technology: Mr. Eric Esteban reported progress on network upgrades, with four buildings completed and two remaining. Chromebooks were configured and distributed to students, and the remaining iPads for Prairie Trail and River Trail kindergarten students were expected to be ready the following day. Teacher devices were also delivered, including devices for River Trail staff. The Technology Department is addressing phishing attempts and plans to provide staff training on warning signs and proper reporting procedures.

Dr. Correa introduced the instructional priorities plans, explaining they replace previous school improvement plans with a new template aligning instructional priorities to the learning framework and portrait of a graduate. The plans focus on adult actions with goals for student outcomes.

Instructional Priorities Plans

Spaulding's Instructional Priorities Plan continues the school's work based on the Illinois Quality Framework rubric and the root-cause analysis completed following its targeted designation. The plan is grounded in the belief that every student deserves access to grade-level learning. Through short-term learning cycles, teachers will plan, teach, assess, reteach, and extend reading and math instruction based on individual student needs. The school will also promote self-regulation and belonging through morning meetings and Zones of Regulation. Spaulding's motto is: "Learning together, planning together, responding together—Spaulding together."

Prairie Trail analyzed its 5Essentials Survey data and found that, while Universal Design for Learning has reduced barriers for students, additional opportunities are needed for student dialogue, questioning, and critical thinking. The school will focus on developing creative and critical thinkers who ask meaningful questions, investigate ideas, use evidence, accept feedback, and persevere through challenges. Implementation will be supported through Wednesday professional development, collaborative PLC planning, teacher rounds, studio classrooms, and coaching cycles. For SEL, Prairie Trail will build upon its self-management work by incorporating circles that help students regulate their emotions, listen to one another, and resolve disagreements respectfully.

River Trail's plan focuses on creating a community of learners who take ownership of their education and are excited to come to school. The plan recognizes that social-emotional safety and academic achievement work together. The school will foster a sense of belonging while providing student-centered learning experiences that encourage critical thinking, reasoning, collaboration, and academic risk-taking. Professional learning will continue to focus on Marzano's Six-Step Process for academic vocabulary while expanding Building Thinking Classrooms strategies across grade levels, including kindergarten and first grade.

Viking's plan recognizes that students need effective tools to support emotional regulation and academic growth. Students will learn about their emotions and practice strategies that help them remain calm and become more independent before those strategies are needed. Behavior facilitators, social workers, and Responsibility-Centered Discipline will provide students with conversations, tools, and small-group practice. These groups will also strengthen academic dialogue, collaboration, and understanding of content. Implementation will be supported through Responsibility-Centered Discipline, Kagan structures, strengthened content-based PLCs, classroom visits, and opportunities for meaningful academic discussion.

On a motion from Board Member Pahl with a second from Board Member Kotsinis, the Board voted to approve a one-year extension of the school bus and small passenger bus lease agreement with Midwest Transit Equipment for the 2026-2027 school year, at a cost not to exceed \$656,727.00, as presented by the administration. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, and Mandi Florip (via telephone).

During the *Public Comment* portion of the meeting, no one was present to address the Board of Education.

On a motion by Board Member Kotsinis and seconded by Board President Pos, the Board voted to adjourn open session at 5:44 p.m. The Board went into closed session at 5:44 p.m. to discuss the following items on a roll call vote:

- The appointment, employment, compensation, discipline, performance, or dismissal of specific employees, specific individuals who serve as independent contractors in a park, recreational, or educational setting, or specific volunteers of the public body or legal counsel for the public body, including hearing testimony on a complaint lodged against an employee, a specific individual who serves as an independent contractor in a park,

recreational, or educational setting, or a volunteer of the public body or against legal counsel for the public body to determine its validity. However, a meeting to consider an increase in compensation to a specific employee of a public body that is subject to the Local Government Wage Increase Transparency Act may not be closed and shall be open to the public and posted and held in accordance with this Act. 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(1).

- Student disciplinary cases. 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(9).
- The placement of individual students in special education programs and other matters relating to individual students. 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(10).
- Litigation, when an action against, affecting or on behalf of the particular public body has been filed and is pending before a court or administrative tribunal, or when the public body finds that an action is probable or imminent, in which case the basis for the finding shall be recorded and entered into the minutes of the closed meeting. 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(11).
- We need verbiage for the Board self-evaluation from the card.
- Discussion of minutes of meetings lawfully closed under the Open Meetings Act, whether for purposes of approval by the body of the minutes or semi-annual review of the minutes as mandated by Section 2.06. 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(21).

Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, and Mandi Florip (via telephone).

The Board of Education came out of closed session at 6:03 p.m. on a motion from Board President Pos and seconded by Board Member Kotsinis. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, and Mandi Florip (via telephone).

On a motion from Board Member Kotsinis with a second from Board Member Pahl the Board voted to approve the personnel recommendations as presented by the Superintendent. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, and Mandi Florip (via telephone).

On a motion from Board Member Kotsinis with a second from Board President Pos, the Board voted to approve closed session minutes for the meeting on July 22, 2026, as presented. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, and Mandi Florip (via telephone).

On a motion from Board President with a second from Board Member Kotsinis, the Board voted that the record of the August 26, 2026, meeting of the Board of Education indicate that closed session minutes from January 2025 through June 2026 were reviewed by the Board of Education and that all minutes continue to require confidential treatment. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, and Mandi Florip (via telephone).

A motion was made by Member Kotsinis and seconded by Board Member Pahl to adjourn the meeting at 6:04 p.m. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, and Mandi Florip (via telephone).

Respectfully submitted:

Mark Pos, President

Odie Pahl, Secretary
Board of Education, District #56
Lake County, IL