

**Minutes of Gurnee School District 56
Board of Education Meeting
September 23, 2026**

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

The following Board members were in attendance: Odie Pahl, Mark Pos, Cesar Garcia, Jim Blockinger, Becky Kotsinis, and Mandi Florip and Germain Castellanos (entered the meeting at 5:07 p.m).

Also in attendance:

Luis Correa, Superintendent

Martin Da Costa, Director of Business | CSBO

Eric Esteban, Director of Technology

Lisa West, Director of Curriculum & Instruction

Cuauhtemoc Mendez, Director of Facilities and Grounds

Rachel Solomon, Director of Pupil Services

Miriam Torres, Multilingual & Assessment Coordinator

Principals: Jen Glickley, Dominique Geocaris, Sara Rosheger , and Allison Waller

Aurora Orozco, Board Clerk

Public Hearing for a Holiday Waiver

Dr. Correa reported to the Board the necessity for a Holiday Waiver to be included with the 2026-2027 school calendar. School Code required that school districts that schedule a student attendance day on a holiday provide a public hearing to inform the community of this occurrence. The administration scheduled a student attendance day on Wednesday, November 11, 2026, which is Veterans Day.

Public Hearing on the 2026-202 Budget

Mr. Da Costa presented the FY27 final budget to the Board of Education and highlighted changes in the budget from the tentative budget he had presented on July 22, 2026.

During the *Public Participation* portion of the hearing, no one wished to address the Board of Education on the Holiday Waiver or the 2026-2027 Budget.

A motion was made by Board Member Kotsinis and seconded by Board Member Pahl to adjourn the public hearing at 5:07 p.m. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Jim Blockinger, Mandi Florip, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, and Mark Pos.

Board President Pos called the regular meeting to order at 5:07 p.m.

Board Member Blockinger made a motion, with a second from Board President Pos, to accept the minutes from the regular meeting on August 26, 2026, as presented.

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

The regular August 31, 2026, Treasurer's Report identified cash and investments of \$29,875,325.93. The Revenue Report identified receipts of \$1,614,210.23 and the Expenditure Report identified expenses totaling \$4,622,508.69. The cash balance in the Activity Fund for

August was \$114,679.75. The Financial Reports plus the Revised August (\$3,582,030.42) and Regular September (\$1,697,124.87) Bills for Payment Reports were approved on a motion by Board Member Garcia and seconded by Board Member Pahl. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Jim Blockinger, Mandi Florip, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia and Mark Pos.

During the *Public Participation* portion of the meeting, no one wished to address the Board of Education.

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:

Spaulding School: At Spaulding School, staff participated in late-start Wednesday professional development on morning meetings, one of the instructional priorities plan action steps. Instructional coach Sheila Wells led a fishbowl demonstration of all four parts of morning meetings (greeting, sharing, activity, and morning message), followed by collaborative team planning time. Spaulding is promoting attendance during September Attendance Awareness Month, with several classrooms receiving recognition from the star mascot for outstanding attendance. The school is celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month, beginning with Mrs. Rodriguez's preschool class hosting a panadería (bakery), and will conclude with a district-wide celebration on October 8th called "Spaulding Unidos Somos Mas" (Together We Are More).

Prairie Trail School: At Prairie Trail, the PBIS kickoff assembly introduced a new focus on all students setting goals, led by Mrs. Greathouse with support from Mr. Vega and Mrs. Ramirez, who also provided translation. The PBIS Tier 1 committee is helping lead meetings this year. Late start Wednesday focused on incorporating Kagan structures, with teams deciding whether to implement them together or try different approaches. Friday's early release allowed staff to analyze I-Ready fall data and incorporate instructional priorities into team goals. Fifth graders enjoyed a visit from middle school band students who introduced different instruments.

River Trail School: River Trail School held a career fair in Mr. Ramirez's class where students practiced math skills by purchasing items with specific amounts of money, writing amounts in standard and expanded form. Families brought authentic foods including chicharrón, elotes, and aguas frescas. The event was so well-attended that a larger space will be needed in the future. During late start Wednesday, PLC groups analyzed current student performance, set goals for where students should be, and identified gaps with plans to address them through SMART goals. This work continued into Friday's early release with a gallery walk where teams provided feedback on each other's goals. All SMART goals tie directly to instructional priorities plans. Back to School Blastoff (formerly curriculum night) successfully engaged families through a festival/carnival format with community resources, games, and food, followed by classroom sit-and-get sessions. This approach has proven effective in bringing families back to school events post-COVID.

Viking Middle School: At Viking Middle School, sixth grade language arts students practiced Kagan cooperative learning structures learned at institute days, focusing on communication protocols with specific roles, active listening, and thanking each other after conversations. Social studies students practiced orienteering skills using compasses outdoors at various checkpoints. Seventh and eighth grade band students showcased their skills to Prairie Trail students and participated in the annual Fill the Drum marching showcase at Warren Township's

O'Plaine campus, performing on the 50-yard line while collecting donations and canned goods for Warren Township Food Pantry. The musical crew for The Little Mermaid Jr. rehearsed in the choir classroom when their stage was unavailable, with performances scheduled to begin December 11th.

Strategic Planning Community Stakeholder Session

Dr. Correa highlighted two strategic planning sessions. On September 15th, 34 staff members, including administrators, met at the Lake County ROE building for a full day of learning to kick off the strategic planning process aligned with the public education promise. This session prepared staff for the community stakeholder meeting held on Wednesday night, September 18th, which was attended by approximately 60 people. Several invitees who had not initially responded still attended. Dr. Correa reported receiving positive feedback from parents about how the process started.

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

Technology Department: Mr. Esteban reported that the department is short a couple of technicians and is interviewing candidates for Board consideration at the next meeting. Staff device rollout is more than 50% complete, and the network upgrade is underway. Chromebooks have been well received by middle school students, and staff have responded positively to Securly Classroom.

Maintenance Department: Mr. Mendez reported that sewer backups, water leaks, and HVAC issues were addressed at Prairie Trail, Spaulding, and River Trail. Fire inspections identified only minor concerns. The Prairie Trail reunification path was improved, and vegetation trimming continues districtwide. Prairie Trail's solar panels are back online, and kitchen construction is progressing following receipt of required permits. The department also connected with CLC's HVAC program to explore potential staffing candidates.

Multilingual Department: Mrs. Torres reported that multilingual teachers at Spaulding participated in professional development, and one-way dual language teachers received biliteracy training focused on cross-language connections and language-specific instruction. Kindergarten through second-grade teachers at River Trail received training on social-emotional screening.

Pupil Services Department: Mrs. Solomon reported that specialized staff received Medicaid billing training. Safety drills have been successful districtwide and will continue in the coming weeks. The department is also meeting with building teams to address increased student needs.

Curriculum and Instruction Department: Dr. West reported that teacher rounds will begin at Prairie Trail, followed by other schools. This collaborative professional development allows teachers to observe classroom instruction and reflect together on student learning. Guest teachers have been hired and trained to provide coverage.

Business/Human Resources: Mr. Da Costa reported that the annual staff wellness event will take place next week for employees enrolled in district insurance. IPAS will provide wellness

screenings and optional flu shots at no cost. Appointments remain available, with full participation encouraged to support preventive care and help manage insurance costs.

Dr. Correa requested that the Board of Education make the Professional Leave and Conferences report a matter of record of the minutes of the regular September 23, 2026, Board of Education meeting.

A Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request was received by Dr. Luis Correa via email on September 2, 2026, from CT Mills, requesting existing records showing district-issued direct work telephone numbers, direct dial lines, or work extensions for employees currently serving in the district's Central Office / District Administration Office. On September 3, 2026, Mrs. Orozco responded to CT Mills via email, and provided the responsive records.

A second Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request was received by Dr. Luis Correa via email on September 2, 2026, from Mr. Jomer Genite (Smart Procure) requesting current employee/staff contact information. Mrs. Orozco responded to Mr. Genite via email on September 3, 2026, and provided the responsive records.

A third Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request was received by Mr. Da Costa via email on August 25, 2026, from Mr. Marlon Anderson (Midwest Bus Sales), requesting Bus purchase and lease records and bid tabulations, 2016-2026, and any executed purchase or lease agreements, and related board award memoranda, for school buses or other pupil-transportation vehicles within the same period. On September 9, 2026, Mrs. Orozco responded to Mr. Anderson via email on September 9, 2026, and provided the responsive records.

A fourth Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request was received by Dr. Luis Correa via email on September 14, 2026, from Mr. Justin Wenig (Star Bridge FOIA Records) requesting existing electronic records maintained by Gurnee School District 56 reflecting payment records for all vendor entities (companies, organizations, contractors, and other non-person payees) from January 1, 2026, to the current date, purchase date, vendor name, line-item description, and line-item amount. Mrs. Orozco responded to Mr. Wenig via email on September 15, 2026, and provided the responsive records.

A fifth Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request was received by Mrs. Rachel Solomon via email on September 15, 2026, from Mrs. Jennifer Mitchell (Economic Research Institute), requesting information on salaries for different jobs/positions in the public education (school districts): job titles, Incumbent Count (# of employees in that position), and Average Annual Salary for each job title. Mrs. Orozco responded to Mrs. Mitchell via email on September 17, 2026, and provided the responsive records.

A sixth Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request was received by Dr. Luis Correa via email on September 9, 2026, from Mr. Matthew Zechiel of Dudley & Lake, LLC. The request asked the district to preserve electronic evidence and provide any exterior security camera footage of an August 18, 2026, incident on Country Club Avenue. The requester stated that no claim was being made against the district. On September 17, 2026, Mrs. Orozco responded to Mr. Thomas Lake via email and provided the responsive video through Google Drive.

A seventh Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request was received by Mrs. Aurora Orozco via email on September 17, 2026, from Mr. Oshea Smith (Free Sunlight Access), requesting an information summary of purchase orders (not the individual purchase orders themselves) issued by Gurnee School District 56 from March 1, 2026 to July 31, 2026. Vendor name, description of purchase or payment, total price or amount paid. Mrs. Orozco responded to Mr. Smith via email on September 17, 2026, and provided the responsive records.

On a motion from Board President Pos with a second from Board Member Pahl, the Board voted to approve a student attendance day for Veterans Day on Wednesday, November 11, 2026, as presented at the public hearing on September 23, 2026. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Jim Blockinger, Mandi Florip, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia and Mark Pos.

On a motion from Board Member Blockinger with a second from Board President Pos, the Board voted to approve the final FY27 Budget as presented at the public hearing on September 23, 2026. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Jim Blockinger, Mandi Florip, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia and Mark Pos.

Dr. Correa presented to the Board of Education a group of policies to review to ensure that those policies reflected the intent of the Board. This was a goal of the Board made during training provided by the Illinois Association of School Boards (IASB). Ultimately, all Board policies would be reviewed during a three-year cycle. Current policies for review were 1:10, 1:20, 1:30, 5:10, 5:12, 5:20, and 5:30. The Board would officially approve the recommended changes at the next Board of Education meeting.

Mr. Da Costa shared with the Board of Education the Administrator and Teacher Salary and Benefit Report. This report needed to be submitted to the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) prior to October 1st of each year after being approved by the Board of Education. The district was also required to publish the report on the District's website each year. On a motion from Board Member Pahl with a second from Board Member Garcia, the Board voted to approve the Administrator and Teacher Salary and Benefit Report with the discussed corrections. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Jim Blockinger, Mandi Florip, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia and Mark Pos.

Prairie Trail Connection Fee Approval

Mr. Da Costa requested board approval and ratification of an emergency payment to Northshore Water Reclamation District for connection fees associated with the Prairie Trail Elementary School kitchen addition. The total payment of \$35,887.50 includes \$17,437.50 for Annexation No. 451 and an \$18,450.00 connection fee. The payment was made before the board meeting to expedite construction and mobilize the construction crew, but administration wanted to ensure board awareness and approval for transparency. The Board President expressed appreciation for the transparency. On a motion from Board Member Florip with a second from Board Member Garcia, the Board voted to approve Prairie Trails School Connection. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Jim Blockinger, Mandi Florip, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia and Mark Pos.

Band Trip Proposal

Dr. Correa presented a band trip proposal for Viking Middle School to visit the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Wisconsin Dells on April 16-17, 2026. The trip has been done before and provides students the experience of performing in a different setting while being away overnight. At UW-Madison, band students will perform, attend a clinic with faculty or graduate students for valuable feedback, and tour the music/fine arts campus. Students will then enjoy water park activities and stay overnight at Kalahari Resort in Wisconsin Dells. The cost is \$100 per family for transportation and lodging, with students paying for their own meals. Do Re Mi (the band booster organization) covers the remaining balance and helps students who may be struggling financially to attend. Band teachers do an excellent job promoting the trip and ensuring all families can participate regardless of financial challenges. A board member asked what grades participate, and Dr. Correa confirmed it is for 6th through 8th grade middle school students. On a motion from Board President Pos with a second from Board Member Garcia, the Board voted to approve the Band Trip Proposal. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Jim Blockinger, Mandi Florip, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia and Mark Pos.

Board Member Castellanos made a motion to approve the following items as presented on the consent agenda. Board Member Pahl seconded the motion.

- Prairie Trail School Great Americans People's Choice Fundraising Request
- Prairie Trail School Great Americans Spring Dance Fundraising Request
- River Trail School Yearbook Panera Bread
- River Trail School SSC T-Shirt Fundraising Request
- Viking Middle School SSC Fall Dance Fundraising Request
- Viking Middle School PBIS 1 Chipotle Fundraising Request
- Viking Middle School PBIS 1 Buona Beef Fundraising Request
- DoReMi 50/50 Raffle Fundraising Request
- DoReMi Popcorn Fundraising Request

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

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

On a motion by Board Kotsinis and seconded by Board President Pos, the Board voted to adjourn open session at 5:51 p.m. The Board went into closed session at 5:53 pm. to discuss the following items on a roll call vote:

- The appointment, employment, compensation, discipline, performance, or dismissal of specific employees of the district or legal counsel for the District, including hearing testimony on a complaint lodged against an employee or against legal counsel for the District to determine its validity. 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(1), as amended by P.A. 93-0057.
- 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 District has been filed and is pending before a court or administrative tribunal, or when the District finds that an action is probable or imminent, in which case the basis for the finding shall be recorded and entered into the closed meeting minutes. 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(11).

- Discussion of lawfully closed meeting minutes, 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: Jim Blockinger, Mandi Florip, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, and Mark Pos.

The Board of Education came out of closed session at 5:59 p.m. on a motion from Board Member Kotsinis and seconded by Board President Pos. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Jim Blockinger, Mandi Florip, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia and Mark Pos.

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

On a motion from Board Member Blockinger with a second from Board Member Pahl, the Board voted to approve closed session minutes for the meeting on August 26, 2026, as presented. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Jim Blockinger, Mandi Florip, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, and Mark Pos.

A motion was made by Board Member Kotsinis and seconded by Board President Pos to adjourn the meeting at 6:01 p.m. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Jim Blockinger, Mandi Florip, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, and Mark Pos.

Respectfully submitted:

Mark Pos, President

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