Minutes of Gurnee School District 56
Board of Education Meeting
October 28, 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 (via telephone) and Germain Castellanos (5:04 pm)

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

Recognition of IESA State Cross Country Qualifier

Before the regular meeting, President Pos recognized River Trail sixth grader Antonio Avila for qualifying for the IESA State Cross Country Meet. Antonio placed 106th out of 223 runners and achieved a personal best of 12:00.

Board President Pos called the regular meeting to order at 5:03 p.m.

Board Member Blockinger made a motion, with a second from Board Member Pahl, to accept the minutes from the regular meeting on September 23, 2026, as presented.
Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Germain Castellanos, and Mandi Florip (via telephone).

The regular September 30, 2026, Treasurer's Report identified cash and investments of $35,540,142.73. The Revenue Report identified receipts of $10,226,803.87 and the Expenditure Report identified expenses totaling $2,830,704.08. The cash balance in the Activity Fund for September was $111,705.49. The Financial Reports, plus the Revised September ($1,639,025.47) and Regular October ($2,648,159.25) Bills for Payment Reports, were approved on a motion by Board Member Pahl and seconded by Board Member Kotsinis. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Germain Castellanos, and Mandi Florip (via telephone).

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:

Viking Middle School welcomed the Mobile Museum of Tolerance, providing students with educational workshops on civil rights, online bullying, hate speech, digital footprints, and responsible online behavior. Eighth-grade students also attended the Navigate Lake Career Exploration Event at the Lake County Fairgrounds, where they explored career pathways and interacted with local businesses and professionals. Additionally, Viking held its first band and choir concert of the school year, showcasing students' musical talents.

River Trail School highlighted its annual Fall Fun Run, during which students participated in running activities along the Des Plaines River Trail, followed by a schoolwide picnic. Students also participated in Hispanic Heritage Month activities, learning about different Latino countries and cultures through research, presentations, music, and dance. Additional highlights included the Global Monster Project, which promotes writing and collaboration with classrooms around the world, and the school's annual chess tournament.

Prairie Trail School highlighted several instructional activities, including third- and fifth-grade book buddies, hands-on lessons about the life cycle of apples, and third-grade multiplication projects using array cities. Teachers also shared their continued implementation of Kagan cooperative learning strategies, classroom circles, and professional learning opportunities through studio classrooms to support student engagement and collaboration.

Spaulding School celebrated Attendance Awareness Month with a special event recognizing classrooms for their outstanding attendance. Students also enjoyed a visit from Chicago Bears mascot Staley Da Bear as part of their PBIS celebration. Additionally, Spaulding participated in the District's Hispanic Heritage Month celebration, which included cultural performances, music, food, and student-created ofrendas.

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

Business/Human Resources – Mr. Da Costa

Mr. Da Costa reported that he met with representatives from Woodland School District 50 and Warren Township High School District 121 to discuss opportunities for shared services and cooperative purchasing. These partnerships are intended to streamline operations, increase purchasing power, and identify potential cost savings for all three districts.

Curriculum and Instruction Department – Dr. West

Dr. West's department update was incorporated into her EPIC Conference presentation, which highlighted the district's continued focus on deeper learning, teacher collaboration, and instructional improvement.

Pupil Services Department – Mrs. Solomon

Mrs. Solomon reported that designated staff members throughout the District participated in de-escalation training to strengthen student behavioral support. She also highlighted social-emotional learning activities, including morning yoga and structured brain breaks to help students with self-regulation. Additionally, the department participated in a job fair to recruit candidates for available positions throughout the District.

Multilingual Department – Mrs. Torres

Mrs. Torres reported that the Bilingual Parent Advisory Committee (BPAC) was preparing for its Día de los Muertos celebration at Spaulding School, which would include student presentations, parent education, and cultural activities. She also highlighted the continued professional development of dual language teachers through classroom observations and instructional strategies known as bridging, which helps students make connections between English and Spanish to strengthen literacy skills in both languages.

Maintenance Department – Mr. Mendez

Mr. Mendez reported that the Maintenance Department completed the transition to heating systems throughout the District and continues addressing necessary boiler, pump, and equipment repairs. Vegetation trimming and preventative maintenance have also been completed. The District successfully completed its Regional Office of Education inspections and fire department walkthroughs. Mr. Mendez also provided an update on the ongoing kitchen construction project, noting that underground plumbing work had been completed and preparations for concrete flooring were underway.

Technology Department – Mr. Esteban

Mr. Esteban reported that the Technology Department welcomed a new staff member and the return of another employee. Teacher laptops and iPads have been upgraded and distributed. Chromebook charging stations have also been installed in classrooms that requested them. The department continues working on network upgrades and plans to implement additional cybersecurity awareness training to address phishing attempts.

EPIC Conference – Dr. West

Dr. West provided an overview of the Ed Leaders Promise Innovation Conference held October 13–14, 2026, in Lombard, Illinois. District 56 staff presented sessions highlighting the District's deeper learning initiatives, Portrait of a Graduate, and Teacher Rounds. Dr. Correa also

presented two sessions focused on educational transformation and the District's learning framework. Key takeaways included exploring the use of artificial intelligence (AI) to support instructional practices and continuing to provide professional development opportunities for teachers.

District Capital Needs and Potential Funding Options – Mr. Da Costa

Mr. Da Costa presented the District's current and long-term capital needs, including HVAC improvements, roofing, fire alarm and sprinkler systems, lighting upgrades, and other facility repairs. The HVAC system at River Trail was identified as a priority due to aging equipment and increasing maintenance concerns. Mr. Da Costa also discussed potential funding options, including operating funds, fund balances, bonds, grants, and other financing opportunities. The administration will continue evaluating project priorities and associated costs before presenting further recommendations to the Board.

Potential Partnership with the Academy for Urban School Leadership – Mr. Da Costa

Mr. Da Costa discussed a potential partnership with the Academy for Urban School Leadership (AUSL) to establish a teacher residency program aimed at recruiting and retaining qualified educators, particularly in special education and bilingual education. The program would provide participants with classroom experience under mentor teachers while earning a master's degree through DePaul University. The estimated cost would be $36,000 per resident, with participants committing to three additional years of employment with the District upon completion. The administration will continue exploring the partnership and provide additional information to the Board.

Transportation Follow-up Regarding Catalytic Converters – Mr. Da Costa

Mr. Da Costa provided an update regarding the September 2, 2026, catalytic converter thefts at the District's transportation facility. All affected buses have been repaired and returned to service. The District has taken additional security measures, including removing vegetation around the property and upgrading surveillance cameras and monitoring systems in partnership with Warren Township High School District. Additional fencing and security improvements are being evaluated to help prevent future incidents.

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 October 28, 2026, Board of Education meeting.

A Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request was received by Dr. Luis Correa via email on October 1, 2026, from Data Branch Research Team, Celeste Donovan, requesting existing files covering all purchase orders issued between June 7,2026 to present. Office. On October 15, 2026, Mrs. Orozco responded to Ms. Donovan via email and provided the responsive records.

On a motion from Board President Pos with a second from Board Member Garcia the Board voted to approve Board policies under review (Policies 1:10, 1:20, 1:30, 5:10, 5:12, 5:20, and 5:30) and to adopt those policies as presented by the administration. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Germain Castellanos, and Mandi Florip (via telephone).

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 3:10, 3:30, 3:40, 5:35, 5:40, 5:50, and 5:60. The Board would officially approve the recommended changes at the next Board of Education meeting.

Mr. Da Costa reviewed the 2026 Tax Levy process, which involves three key steps. During tonight's meeting, he discussed proposed tax rate considerations. The Board will take formal action to approve the levy at the November meeting, and the final document will be filed with the Lake County Clerk by the last Thursday of the calendar year.

Local sources remain the district's largest revenue stream, with approximately 80% derived from property taxes. Property taxes in Lake County are capped, meaning existing dwellings cannot be taxed beyond the Consumer Price Index (CPI). Mr. Da Costa emphasized that this cap protects homeowners while allowing the district to adjust for new construction to help balance the tax burden across the community.

The current CPI for this tax levy is **2.7%**, with projections indicating a slight decrease next year. Mr. Da Costa noted that national economic factors—such as potential federal interest rate cuts—reflect a slowing economy, which impacts CPI trends. To ensure continued fiscal stability and balance between new and existing properties, Mr. Da Costa is recommending a **4.99% tax levy** for 2026.

Since the Tax Levy's increase would be under 5%, a Truth in Taxation Hearing would not be necessary. On a motion from Board Member Castellanos with a second from Board President Pos, the Board voted to approve the Tax Levy rates as recommended by the administration. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Germain Castellanos, and Mandi Florip.

Mr. Da Costa shared with the Board of Education the status of the FY27 budget after the first quarter. Revenues were on track at 33.08% and expenditures at 24.99%.

Mrs. Solomon presented the Intergovernmental Agreement with Northbrook School District 27 to provide programming for students with disabilities referred by Gurnee School District 56. On a motion from Board Member Pahl with a second from Board Member Garcia, the Board voted to approve the Intergovernmental Agreement with Northbrook District 27 as recommended by the administration. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Germain Castellanos, and Mandi Florip (via telephone).

During the *Public Participation* portion of the hearing, no one wished 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 6:46 p.m. The Board went into closed session at 6:49 p.m. 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: Mandi Florip, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, and Jim Blockinger.

The Board of Education came out of closed session at 7:34 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: Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Germain Castellanos, and Mandi Florip (via telephone).

On a motion from Board President Pos, with a second from Board Member Blockinger, the Board voted to approve the personnel recommendations as presented by the Superintendent, excluding the employment recommendation for Rachael Rezek, Library Teacher Aide at Viking Middle School. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Germain Castellanos, and Mandi Florip (via telephone).

On a Motion from the Board President Pos, with a second from Board Member Pahl to affirm the decision on the Uniform Grievance Procedure complaint filed by the employee identified in closed session. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Germain Castellanos, and Mandi Florip (via telephone).

On a motion from Board Member Blockinger with a second from Board Member Kotsinis, the Board voted to approve closed session minutes for the meeting on September 23, 2026, as presented. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Germain Castellanos, and Mandi Florip (via telephone).

A motion was made by Board Member Kotsinis and seconded by Board Member Pahl to adjourn the meeting at 7:37 p.m. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Germain Castellanos, and Mandi Florip (via telephone).

Respectfully submitted:

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