

Minutes of Gurnee School District 56
Board of Education Meeting
December 17, 2025

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

Also in attendance:

Luis Correa, Superintendent
Martin Da Costa, Director of Business | CSBO
Eric Esteban, Director of Technology
Pete Helfers, Director of Curriculum & Instruction
Rachel Solomon, Director of Pupil Services
Miriam Torres, Multilingual & Assessment Coordinator
Principals: Dominique Geocaris, Jen Glickley, 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.

Board Member Blockinger made a motion with a second from Board President Pos to accept the minutes from the regular meeting on November 19, 2025, as presented. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Mandy Florip, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, and Becky Kotsinis.

The regular November 30, 2025, Treasurer's Report identified cash and investments of \$35,017,293.70. The Revenue Report identified receipts of \$1,567,900.71 and the Expenditure Report identified expenses totaling \$1,886,056.71. The cash balance in the Activity Fund for November was \$105,941.31. The Financial Reports plus the Revised November (\$1,720,108.01) and Regular December (\$4,892,244.67) Bills for Payment Reports, were approved on a motion by Board President Pos and seconded by Board Member Castellanos. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Mandy Florip, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, and Becky Kotsinis.

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

Ms. Renetrice Pierre, a substitute employee in the district, addressed the Board regarding student safety, school climate, and her concerns about retaliation. She stated that she has worked in education since 2010 and spoke despite apprehension because she felt the issue was important.

Ms. Pierre described an incident involving students using the phrase "6-7," which she stated she researched and believes is associated with violent themes in music lyrics. She explained that she addressed this with students out of concern for safety and to

encourage critical thinking about trends. She reported that a staff member later disagreed with her approach and that subsequent substitute assignments at that school were canceled, which she believes was retaliatory.

She further shared concerns about a student who made statements related to firearms and later made threats toward other students, which caused her to fear for her safety. Ms. Pierre expressed concern that the school dedicated instructional time to the phrase she believes has violent connotations and urged the Board and administration to conduct due diligence, including consultation with law enforcement, regarding student safety and the appropriateness of such content. She also expressed concern about academic readiness of students.

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: Spaulding School recognized its Preschool for All program for earning the Gold Circle of Quality, a high standard in early childhood education. The recognition reflects the collaborative efforts of preschool teachers, assistants, and support staff, including related service providers, and highlights the school's commitment to high-quality early learning.

Prairie Trail: Prairie Trail highlighted ongoing band activities, including a dance ensemble performance for fifth graders and the school's first fifth-grade band concert, where students were recognized for progress toward earning their white belts. Classroom highlights included real-world learning connections in math and science, hands-on experiments, and creative projects such as third-grade chalk art inspired by the northern lights, bringing joy and engagement throughout the school.

River Trail: River Trail highlighted student leadership and cross-grade collaboration through mixed-group lunches led by eighth graders and a Spanish pen-pal partnership between eighth-grade Spanish classes and third-grade bilingual students. Additional highlights included student advisory food tastings with Quest, multiple student recognitions, strong community partnerships with Gurnee Community Church supporting winter clothing donations, and a guest presentation by a parent archaeologist that provided hands-on learning experiences for students.

Viking: Viking School highlighted a sixth-grade health fair featuring multiple wellness stations, including nutrition, hygiene, substance awareness, CPR, yoga, and stress-management activities. Additional highlights included lunchtime community-building opportunities to support positive peer relationships, a successful recent musical production, student recognition through the Gurnee Exchange for eighth grader Grace Brogan, and a recent choir concert showcasing student talent.

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

Mr. Da Costa: The Business Office reported that the tax levy was filed with the Lake County Clerk well in advance of the December 30 deadline. The office will remain fully operational during winter break to complete the year-end 2025 financial closeout and prepare for the start of the 2026 calendar year, including processing the first payroll on Friday, January 2.

Mr. Helfers: The Curriculum and Instruction Department reported that instructional coaches and school leaders participated in a Coaching for Professional Learning workshop to strengthen collaborative practices and continuous improvement. The department also adjusted the timeline for advanced placement assessments by administering testing in November rather than April, allowing for earlier data review and improved communication with families; this new process is being implemented for the first time and has gone well despite a learning curve. Additionally, grades 3–5 ELA teachers were trained in Magnetic Literacy and plan to pilot the program following winter break. Staff interest is strong, as teachers have already used and responded positively to related resources, and the district currently utilizes Magnetic Learning products in math at the K–5 level.

Mrs. Solomon: Student Services reported that staff attended a Student Safety and Violence Incident Management training hosted locally, which will support the development of the district's relocation and emergency response plans in collaboration with fire and police agencies. In addition, the special education audit is currently underway, with a review of selected IEPs to ensure compliance and identify opportunities for improvement.

Ms. Torres: The Multilingual Department reported ongoing support for school improvement planning across buildings, including a focus this month on accessibility for multilingual learners at Prairie Trail. The department also attended the State Multilingual Conference to support continued professional learning.

Mr. Esteban: The Technology Department reported ongoing meetings with vendors to discuss network upgrades and continued security updates within Skyward. Planning is underway for Phase One and Phase Three technology updates, including laptop and iPad refreshes. In addition, the department is evaluating StatusGator as a notification tool to provide real-time alerts on application and network service issues across district systems.

The Board President shared an update on Pete's recent presentation at the James Club *One Nation Under God* breakfast, where he spoke about the district's Veterans Day celebration and his personal experiences as a veteran. Pete represented Gurnee District 56 in a highly positive and informative manner, contributing to a meaningful program that included patriotic music. Appreciation was expressed for his time and representation of the district.

The Board of Education took this time to share the sessions that they had attended at the Triple I conference. Board members shared reflections from sessions attended at the IASB Triple I Conference, highlighting the value of networking opportunities, general sessions, and keynote speakers. Topics discussed included the evolving role of artificial intelligence in education, approaches to supporting English learners, and early workforce and career readiness initiatives through partnerships with higher education and local organizations. Members also noted sessions on effective board governance and the importance of maintaining a non-micromanaging, supportive board culture. Additionally, discussion included funding challenges facing districts due to uncertainty in federal programs, such as Title I, and the need to begin planning for the district's next strategic plan as the current five-year plan approaches expiration.

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 December 17, 2025, Board of Education meeting.

A Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request was received by Dr. Luis Correa via email on December 5, 2025, from CT Mills (Public Info Access LLC) requesting the most current existing records listing all active employees within Gurnee School District 56, reflecting the following information: Full Name, Title/Position, Work email address and Work Location (School Name of Central Office).

Mrs. Orozco responded to CT Mills via email on December 8, 2025, with the requested information.

On a motion from Board Member Florip with a second from Board Member Pahl, the Board voted to adopt the attached policies from PRESS Issue 120 October 2025 as presented by the administration. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Mandy Florip, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, and Becky Kotsinis.

On a motion from Board Member Pahl with a second from Board President Pos, the Board voted to approve Board policies under review (Policies 4:160, and 4:165) and to adopt those policies as presented by the administration. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Mandy Florip, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, and Becky Kotsinis.

Dr. Correa presented to the Board of Education for first reading the proposed calendar for the 2026-2027 school year; no action was required at this time. The calendar was developed in coordination with Warren and Woodland to align key dates and breaks in order to better serve shared families, staff, and students. Highlights include the first day of student attendance on August 19, 2026, and a projected last day of school on May 28, 2027, allowing the school year to end earlier than usual. Winter and spring breaks are aligned with neighboring districts, and late-start Wednesdays are included throughout the year, with the exception of the first day of student attendance. The district will continue to collaborate with partner districts to make adjustments as needed, particularly around high school finals schedules.

Mr. Esteban presented a proposal from CISO Communications to expand the district's partnership through a comprehensive refresh of the district and school websites. Administration reported that this work builds on recent efforts to improve districtwide communication following the communication assessment survey. The proposed next phase focuses on improving website navigation, accessibility, and ensuring content is current and accurate across all sites. The proposal includes approximately 100 hours of work to review and refresh the district office and school websites at a total cost of \$16,000. Recent improvements to the website, including updated imagery and enhanced navigation, were noted; however, this proposed work is separate from ongoing communications support and would allow for a more comprehensive website update.

On a motion from Board Member Blockinger with a second from Board President Pos, the Board voted to approve the proposal for the district website refresh as recommended by the administration. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Mandy Florip, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, and Becky Kotsinis.

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

On a motion by Board Member Kotsinis and seconded by Board Member President Pos, the Board voted to adjourn open session at 5:43 p.m. The Board went into closed session at 5:47 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).

- Collective negotiating matters between the public body and its employees or their representatives, or deliberations concerning salary schedules for one or more classes of employees. 5ILCS 120/2(C)(1).
- 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: Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Mandy Florip, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, and Becky Kotsinis.

The Board of Education came out of closed session at 6:00 p.m. on a motion from Board President Pos and seconded by Member Pahl. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Mandy Florip, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, and Becky Kotsinis.

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

On a motion from Board Member Florip with a second from Board Member Garcia, the Board voted to approve the Collective Bargaining Agreement between the Board of Education and the Gurnee 56 Support Staff Council for the time period through June 30, 2029. And motion to approve the Non-Precedent Agreement with Gurnee 56 Support Staff Council, regarding the annualized payroll schedule. Roll Call: Ayes: Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Mandy Florip, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, and Becky Kotsinis.

On a motion from Board Member Pahl with a second from Board President Pos, the Board voted to approve closed session minutes for the meeting on November 19, 2025, as presented. Roll Call: Ayes: Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Mandy Florip, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, and Becky Kotsinis.

A motion was made by Board Member Pahl and seconded by Board Member Florip to adjourn the meeting at 6:00 p.m. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Mandy Florip, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, and Becky Kotsinis.

Respectfully submitted:

Mark Pos, President

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