

# THE PROUD 23 COMMUNITY Connection

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE PROSPECT HEIGHTS SCHOOL DISTRICT 23 COMMUNITY

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*Asst. Superintendent  
for Teaching and Learning*

Amy McPartlin  
*Asst. Superintendent  
for Finance and Operations*

Dr. Chrys Sroka  
*Asst. Superintendent  
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## ADDRESSING CRITICAL NEEDS WITH NO-TAX-IMPACT FUNDING PLAN CONSTRUCTION ON SMALLER EISENHOWER ADDITION TO BEGIN THIS SUMMER

District 23 is moving forward with a no-tax-impact plan to build a smaller addition to Eisenhower Elementary School and address the most urgent building issues at MacArthur Middle School – by refinancing current debt to cover construction costs, while reducing some staffing and/or programs to provide the necessary operational funds. The plan, approved by the Board of Education in August, enables the District to meet the state-mandated full-day kindergarten deadline of August 2027, and fulfill other critical programming, safety and facility needs.

After the failure of last April's reduced tax referendum, administrators investigated new fiscally responsible ways to ensure the schools are adequately serving students, staff and the community – today and in the future. "Our needs are significant, and they are not going away. With our limited funding options, we had to take a fresh look and develop a more strategic, perhaps non-traditional solution," says Dr. Don Angelaccio, superintendent.

The solution involves significantly scaling back the scope of the work to include only the most high-priority items, then borrowing funds, paying off existing debt and extending payments for 30 years – to provide \$16.5 million for the prioritized projects. This is similar to a homeowner using a home equity loan to borrow against the equity in their property. In addition, the District will develop a plan for cutting operational costs to help fund the ongoing staffing, supply and utility needs that will stem from adding full-day kindergarten and the new space.

Angelaccio says the solution is less than the District and many in the community had hoped for, as it requires further budget reductions, and the reduced Eisenhower addition does not provide space for expansion of services or allow the school to meet other new mandates that will likely be coming down the road. "But we must work with the funding available to us and find realistic, creative solutions that meet as many high-priority needs as possible," he says. "I believe this plan does that. It provides needed space for instruction and support, protects the community's investment in the buildings and improves safety and security."



See P. 5 for a list of the projects, the timeline and more details about the financing. Also scan the QR code to visit the Building a Better D23 website, where regular updates are posted.



## A FEW WORDS FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

We've kicked off the school year with a new theme that captures the feeling of excitement for the adventures that await students and families. The theme is "Ready, Player D23!" And yes, we are certainly ready for a year that will bring changes and growth for every student and the entire district.

As you'll read in this newsletter, we have developed a plan for meeting D23's critical needs while being responsive to the community's wishes. This means a scaled-back list of priorities and no-tax-impact financing. This solution is not ideal, as it will likely require budget reductions and does not allow us to expand services and programming. But it accomplishes our

most essential goals. So I am pleased that even though our referendum attempts have not been successful, we have come together to ensure we are meeting student needs today and acting in the best interest of the community for the long term.

Our Strategic Plan goals for 2025-2026 are: articulating the need for sustainable financing; planning the design and build of an Eisenhower addition; replacing MacArthur windows, siding and doors; and enhancing family engagement events. We're also focused on Curriculum and Instructional goals, including implementing renewed math curriculum this year and reviewing current Social Emotional Learning curriculum and Specials/Exploratory courses. In addition, we are prioritizing important safety goals – read more on P. 4.

As you'll see below, the Board of Education has started succession planning efforts. It's hard to believe I've been with D23 for 14 wonderful years, nine

**'...WE HAVE COME TOGETHER TO ENSURE WE ARE MEETING STUDENT NEEDS TODAY AND ACTING IN THE BEST INTEREST OF THE COMMUNITY FOR THE LONG TERM.'**



**Dr. Craig Curtis and Dr. Don Angelaccio with students at the Ross/Sullivan Learning Patch. Read more on P. 3.**

as your superintendent. We still have a lot of work to do, and a lot of fun to have – so it's far too soon to talk about goodbyes. Instead, I want to thank students, families and staff for getting the year off to a great start. I've enjoyed seeing so many of you at events like Family Fest and our recent Drive-In Movie Night, and I look forward to continuing to connect with you throughout the year. Thank you for making me **PROUD TO BE D23!**

Don Angelaccio, Ed.D.  
Superintendent of Schools,  
Prospect Heights School District 23

## SUCCESSION PLANNING BEGINS: BOARD TO SEEK COMMUNITY INPUT IN PREPARATION FOR RETIREMENT OF SUPERINTENDENT AND OTHERS

The Board of Education has developed a Succession Planning Committee to support the District through upcoming leadership transitions. Dr. Don Angelaccio, superintendent, is set to close out his current contract at the end of the 2026-2027 year, and other members of the District's small leadership team are expected to retire within the next five years.

"It is important to the Board, and to me personally, to ensure continuity and a smooth transition so we can continue the amazing work happening each day," Angelaccio says. "We all have worked so hard to move District 23 forward and are committed to seeing continued growth and success, even after we've passed the baton."

"The Board is grateful to Dr. Angelaccio for his vision and initiatives, including increasing student achievement, providing leadership throughout COVID, strengthening community engagement and fostering a climate of inclusion," says Becky McClaney, Board president. "We look forward to continuing the collaborative relationship throughout the remainder of his term."

Over the next two years, the Succession Planning Committee will seek input from the community, parents, staff and students. "While the superintendent is the most visible of positions, we want to support transitions in all leadership roles," says Dr. Spencer Long, Board vice president and chair of the Succession Planning Committee.



## A BIG WELCOME TO NEW HEAD OF OPERATIONS

Board president Becky McClaney congratulates Luis Gonzalez on his appointment as D23's new director of operations. He brings to his role experience in maintenance, custodial services and construction management from his previous positions in Libertyville and Komarek school districts.



## LEARNING PATCH BRINGS HANDS-ON SCIENCE EXPLORATION TO STUDENTS

Students of Anne Sullivan and Betsy Ross Elementary Schools have a new and inspiring place right outside their door to get their hands dirty and experience hands-on science learning. The Ross/Sullivan Learning Patch, an outdoor garden that was unveiled in a ribbon cutting ceremony on Sept. 18, is the result of a collaborative effort by the schools, District administration, the PTO and local Eagle Scout Gavin Salefski, a D23 alum who provided the labor and installation support as part of his Eagle Scout service project.



**Ross and Sullivan students celebrate the opening of The Learning Patch.**



**Students plant flowers in the garden boxes that were donated by the PTO.**

Sullivan principal Traci Meziere and Ross principal Stephanie Gage collaborated on updating curriculum, to strengthen opportunities for both schools to use the garden for real-life application of science lessons. Second- through fifth-grade teachers recently kicked off the new lessons by bringing their students to the space to plant flowers, perennials and ground cover.

It took three years to plan and create The Learning Patch.

There had been a small outdoor garden at Ross, but it was insufficient for teachers to bring their students outside to study plant growth, water cycles and other components of the science curriculum. After the PTO generously donated funds to purchase new garden boxes, the District began researching and budgeting for landscaping and other logistics of creating a new outdoor learning space. But the initial costs were outside of the scope of the budget, so the project was placed on hold. Fortunately, The Learning Patch became a reality when Salefski stepped in to offer building support.

Students, staff, administrators and Board of Education members participated in the ribbon cutting to officially launch The Learning Patch. "We are so grateful to Gavin, our partners, vendors and everyone who contributed to the creation of this space, and we look forward to years of outdoor learning," says Dr. Angelaccio, superintendent.



**At the Sept. 18 ribbon cutting for The Learning Patch: Board members Brian Greidanus, Tracey Morrissey and Carol Botwinski; Sullivan principal Traci Meziere; Dr. Don Angelaccio, superintendent; Eagle Scout/D23 alum Gavin Salefski; Ross principal Stephanie Gage; PTO rep Gina Salefski; and Board president Becky McClaney.**

## FAMILIES FLOCK TO ANNUAL FEST

Members of MacArthur Orchestra perform for fans at Family Fest, held outside at Sullivan and MacArthur on Sept. 12. The annual free event for all D23 families featured pizza sold by the PTO and sno-cones and churros sold by MacArthur Student Senate, along with fun family activities like mini golf, bouncy houses and performances by other MacArthur VIM (Vocal Instrument and Music) groups. In addition, the Board of Education provided free popcorn, and local partners shared information with community members. Families also brought plants to donate to the new Plant Your Roots Community Garden on the Ross and Sullivan campus.







## COMMUNITY ASKED TO HELP MAKE D23 A SAFE PLACE FOR ALL

One of District 23's priorities this school year is focusing on the essential Strategic Plan goal of maintaining a safe school community, which includes ensuring preparedness around procedures, drills and training; physical grounds; guest and visitor management; cybersecurity; classroom access; and staff and student wellbeing.

As part of its focus on safety, the District has rolled out a new guest/visitor management screening system in all four buildings this year. Visitors are required to take a photo and scan a driver's license (or other valid ID) before being admitted into student areas.



In addition, the District is reminding families, students, staff and community members of some essential safety practices:

- Slow down and watch for increased walking, bike, scooter and car traffic in the neighborhoods and near the schools.
- Comply with traffic rules and stop arms when buses are loading and unloading students.
- Follow the direction of crossing guards and staff during drop-off and pick-up.
- Walk all bikes and scooters (motorized or pedal) on school grounds.
- Be mindful of school neighbors and avoid parking in front of residences when dropping off or picking up from school.

D23 thanks all community members for having enhanced safety awareness when in and around the schools.

## COMMUNICATIONS UPDATES: NATIONAL HONORS AND NEW TOOL

- District 23 has won two **Awards of Excellence from the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA)** for this newsletter, The Proud 2BD23 Community Connection. The prestigious awards were given in two Publications and Digital Media categories – Newsletters and Finance Publications. These awards recognize outstanding publications and outreach that "exemplify the impactful, innovative work shaping the future of school communication." The 2025 recipients are school districts from throughout the country, and there are only eight from Illinois. The Community Connection, which was previously honored with an NSPRA award in 2023, is mailed twice a year to residents who live within District boundaries.
- The District is using a **new user-friendly platform for online newsletters** published by the schools and administration. These newsletters, which are distributed to school families via email, have been redesigned utilizing Smore, a tool that streamlines information, improves mobile viewing and enhances translation. Readers can find overviews of important topics and events, then click links to access more in-depth details. The goal is to ensure families are well informed but not overwhelmed with unnecessary emails. Community members who do not have children in the schools but wish to receive these regular updates can complete the form at <https://tinyurl.com/d23newsletter>.



## PUMPKINS AND JAZZ FOR THE PERFECT FALL MORNING

MacArthur recently held a festive "Fall in Love With Music and Crafts" event before school. Janet Tomenbang, art teacher, and Izabella Gieron, Orchestra director, organized the event, where students listened to jazz standards while crafting a paper garland of pumpkins. The morning gave students the chance to socialize, share ideas and enjoy the creative atmosphere together.

## NEW FUNDING PLAN OPENS DOOR TO BETTER FUTURE: YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

The NO-TAX-IMPACT funding solution refinances current District 23 debt to address critical construction needs. After years of trying to obtain funding to implement full-day kindergarten and make necessary improvements, the new plan is seen as a positive step forward.

### What is the construction cost of the planned projects?

The construction plans that were proposed during the referendum campaigns have been scaled back, and the District is now only pursuing the addition of full-day kindergarten and critical programming, safety and facility projects. These capital projects will cost \$16.5 million.

### How will the District pay for the construction without raising taxes?

The funds for construction will come from a debt issuance and refinancing

plan. This is often seen as a manageable path for a school district to finance major projects without overwhelming their budgets or local taxpayers. The District will borrow funds, pay off existing debt and extend payments for 30 years. This is similar to a homeowner borrowing against the value of a home with a home equity loan and repaying the loan through monthly installments over a period of time. Because the funds are available under District 23's existing tax cap, there will be no tax increase for residents under this plan.

### Are budget cuts also part of this new plan?

Yes, it will likely be necessary to reduce some staffing and/or programs to help offset the added operational costs of full-day kindergarten and the Eisenhower expansion, such as staffing, supplies and utilities. This is because



**Eisenhower students at lunchtime.**

the debt refinancing plan will only fund construction. District 23 is committed to making expenditure reductions every year. In fact, the FY26 budget that was approved in September reflected reductions of \$565,000, or 10%. This was necessary to rebuild fund balances, weather the storm of tax collection delays in Cook County and build for future needs. Administrators will develop additional cost-cutting plans in the coming months.

### Does the District feel this is the best possible financial plan?

The District had hoped to pass a tax referendum to fully fund the necessary projects and avoid further cost-cutting measures. But the third failed referendum attempt in spring 2025 illustrated the need to scale back the projects and develop a new funding strategy. Board members and administrators believe this is a realistic solution that addresses the most critical needs. They will continue investigating and planning for sustainable financing and working to ensure a minimal negative impact on students as much as possible.

### Is another referendum a possibility to avoid program and staffing cuts?

The Board is reviewing all options, including another referendum at a significantly reduced amount, to provide operational funds and support the long-term stability of the District. At its October Board meeting, the Board decided to explore needs and costs for further discussion this spring and summer in advance of the November ballot.

## HIGH-PRIORITY PROJECTS

The District has developed a lower-cost plan for Building a Better D23, addressing only the most urgent needs. The projects in the plan include:

### Eisenhower

- Building 4 new classrooms (reduced from 6) to accommodate full-day kindergarten
- Building 7 offices for interventionists (reduced from 11)
- Building a smaller multipurpose room
- Relocation of the main office
- Limited library renovation
- Replacement and expansion of the east parking lot, to enhance student safety

### MacArthur

- Replacement of deteriorated windows, siding and doors, projects that have been on hold while funding has been determined

### Other

- Limited prioritized capital projects districtwide, such as restroom renovations, paving, flooring or roofing

## CONSTRUCTION CALENDAR

- **Late Fall 2025:** Award bid for MacArthur work
- **Winter 2026:** Award bid for Eisenhower work
- **Spring/Summer 2026:** Construction begins
- **August 2026:** MacArthur work completed
- **August 2027:** Eisenhower work completed, first full-day kindergarten students start school





**Prospect Heights School District 23**  
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## OUR SCHOOLS

### **MacArthur Middle School**

Grades 6-8

Dr. Camron Nystrom, Principal

Mr. Mike Kaper, Asst. Principal

### **Anne Sullivan Elementary**

Grades 4-5

Ms. Traci Meziere, Principal

### **Betsy Ross Elementary**

Grades 2-3

Ms. Stephanie Gage, Principal

### **Eisenhower Elementary**

Grades PreK-1

Dr. Luke Lambatos, Principal

# STRONG START FOR THE 2025-2026 SCHOOL YEAR

Students greeted the first day of school with smiles and thumbs up. Now with fall in full swing, the buildings are bustling, and D23 has a lot of news to share. Here's what you'll find inside this issue of your Community Connection:

- **New plan for addressing urgent needs** – Scaled-back projects and no-tax-impact funding
- **Succession planning** – Board preps for leadership transitions
- **Ross/Sullivan Learning Patch** – Hands-on science exploration in the garden
- **Safety first** – Essential practices when in and around the schools
- **And more!**

