

**Minutes of Gurnee School District 56
Board of Education Meeting
November 19, 2025**

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

Also in attendance:

Luis Correa, Superintendent
Martin Da Costa, Director of Business | CSBO
Eric Esteban, Director of Technology
Pete Helfers, Director of Curriculum & Instruction
Sean Smith, Director of Facilities and Grounds - Absent
Rachel Solomon, Director of Pupil Services
Miriam Torres, Multilingual & Assessment Coordinator
Principals: Dominique Geocaris, Jen Glickley, Sara Roscheger, 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 Member Pahl to accept the minutes from the regular meeting on October 22, 2025, as presented. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Mandy Florip, and Germain Castellanos (via telephone).

The regular October 31, 2025, Treasurer's Report identified cash and investments of \$36,180,558.83. The Revenue Report identified receipts of \$3,318,944.34, and the Expenditure Report identified expenses totaling \$3,990,021.96. The cash balance in the Activity Fund for October was \$99,117.33. The Financial Reports, plus the Revised October (\$1,983,110.01) and Regular November (\$1,367,083.47) Bills for Payment Reports, were approved on a motion by Board Member Pahl and seconded by Board Member Garcia. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Mandy Florip, and Germain Castellanos (via telephone).

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.

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: A Viking school student was selected to participate in the IMEA District 7 Concert Band after competing with students from 74 schools across multiple counties, an impressive achievement that reflects her dedication and musical talent. Sixth-grade students completed a letter-writing activity in which they wrote to a candy company to share their perspectives and ask questions. The students recently received response letters and small souvenirs, which generated great excitement as they read and discussed the company's replies together in class. Viking celebrated Veterans Day with a schoolwide event that included choir and band performances and the creation of community flags. Students worked collaboratively in their homeroom classes to design flags honoring local veterans. The celebration concluded with a veterans walkout, during which students lined the hallways to show their appreciation. Athletics continued to be an area of pride at Viking. Families from both Viking and River Trail, along with Coach DJ, supported the boys' basketball team during recent games, contributing to a strong sense of community and school spirit. Students of the Month for September and October were recognized at a celebratory breakfast for demonstrating leadership, responsibility, and positive character traits. In addition, students in the multilingual classroom created a Día de los Muertos altar to honor cultural traditions and share meaningful stories and items, supporting both cultural awareness and personal expression.

River Trail: The first trimester concluded with a student recognition assembly honoring students who demonstrated respectful, responsible, productive, and safe behaviors. Grade-level homeroom competitions were held, and winning classes earned a themed reading trophy aligned with this year's schoolwide reading focus. Eighth-grade students were recognized for exceptional leadership and academic growth. Sir Von earned a position in the IMEA District 7 Jazz Band after competing with students from 74 schools across McHenry, Lake, and Northern Cook Counties. Teen leaders completed a schoolyard cleanup service project following the snow day. Eighth graders also attended a Lake County career exploration event where they visited career booths, researched career pathways, reviewed education and salary requirements, created personal budgets, and presented their findings to younger students. Middle school students visited all K–5 classrooms to deliver character education lessons aligned with the school improvement plan, focusing on growth mindset, problem-solving, and conflict resolution. Students read picture books and facilitated classroom activities to reinforce these themes. River Trail also celebrated outstanding attendance achievements. More than 100 students earned perfect attendance for the first trimester, and over 70 students received outstanding attendance recognition for missing a half day or less, resulting in nearly 200 students missing one day or less this school year. The school exceeded its trimester reading goal by completing approximately 130,000 minutes of reading, and top Beanstaff readers from multiple grade levels were recognized for their accomplishments.

Prairie Trail: Prairie Trail held its first “Donuts and Turnips” celebration recognizing Students of the Month, who represent this year’s competency focus of being determined learners. Families attended the event, allowing for a full group photo, and students enjoyed choosing their donuts. Younger siblings also joined, giving staff an opportunity to meet future Prairie Trail students. In Mrs. Lynch’s class, instruction this year is organized around thematic units, with the first theme focused on survival. Students explored survival scenarios through reading and media, including *I Survived* books. The classroom was transformed into a campground with faux campfires, and student groups were given budgets to select items needed to “survive” based on a price list. During Dr. Gray’s classroom visit, students participated in making s’mores as part of the authentic learning experience. Prairie Trail raised over \$1,200 during Penny Wars, enabling the school to send another veteran on an Honor Flight through Honor Flight Chicago. Winning classes welcomed veterans who read with students and answered questions about their service. A meaningful moment occurred when the grandfather of fourth-grade teacher Ms. Tori Novak visited classrooms to thank students for their appreciation, noting that his return from Vietnam had not been met with such recognition. His emotional response had a significant impact on students. The school’s civics club, led by Mrs. Lynch, facilitated the Veterans Day assembly, providing leadership opportunities for fifth-grade students. The club continues to prepare for upcoming events as part of Prairie Trail’s emphasis on civic engagement and student leadership.

Spaulding: Spaulding held a schoolwide Veterans Day celebration and was proud to raise enough funds to sponsor a veteran on an Honor Flight. The school welcomed Gretchen Rohr from Honor Flight Chicago, a former member of the District 56 family, who expressed her appreciation for the school’s contributions. Veterans representing all four branches of the Armed Forces participated in a parade through the building as students lined the hallways to cheer them on. The event concluded with an assembly in the gym, where second graders performed songs from their upcoming patriotic concert honoring the branches of the military. Spaulding’s first graders attended a field trip to the Chicago Botanic Garden on November 7. Through a scholarship opportunity, all students were able to attend free of charge, and many parents were able to join them. It was a beautiful day and a memorable experience for students. In recognition of Native American Heritage Month, Mrs. Oakley’s kindergarten class engaged in a classroom project focused on canoes. Students read about canoe traditions, learned about their history, and created their own model canoes. They designed, decorated, assembled, and stitched their final pieces, demonstrating creativity and enthusiasm throughout the activity.

Director of Student Services Rachel Solomon provided an update on districtwide emergency preparedness efforts and presented photos from the recent Cardiac Emergency Response Team training. She highlighted that staff participated in hands-on CPR, AED, and Stop the Bleed instruction. Participants practiced CPR techniques using mannequins, coordinated AED response procedures, and engaged in Stop the Bleed exercises that included applying tourniquets and packing simulated wounds to control

bleeding. The training, held at Viking School, offered staff valuable real-world practice and strengthened the district's overall readiness for emergency situations.

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 Department reported on the district's annual wellness clinic, which was well attended by staff. Employees were able to receive their yearly flu shot and complete comprehensive blood work measuring nearly 100 health markers. These services were provided at no cost to staff through a partnership with the district's insurance provider. The event supported employee wellness and offered convenient access to preventive health services.

Mr. Helfers: In Curriculum & Instruction, reported that Veterans Day was a major focus across the district during the past month, noting the strong participation and impact of districtwide activities. A total of 42 veterans visited District 56 schools, and the district raised \$4,351.65—enough to send nearly four veterans on their Honor Flight through Honor Flight Chicago and Lake County Honor Flight. In curriculum updates, the district continues its review of English Language Arts resources. Middle school teachers requested an extension of their pilot into January, and this request has been accommodated. Additionally, staff in grades three through five will be trained on pilot materials in December as part of the ongoing evaluation and selection process.

Mrs. Solomon: The district has completed training for every member of the Cardiac Emergency Response Team across all four buildings. The department is also preparing for the State's special education cyclical monitoring audit, with initial documentation and compliance steps underway. In addition, Student Services met with two stakeholder groups—parents, community members, and staff—to provide updates on the district's emergency response and cardiac response plans and ensure all stakeholders are informed of current procedures.

Ms. Torres: The Bilingual Department reported that the team held its monthly department meeting, focusing on supporting multilingual learners. Staff reviewed student progress reports and continued preparations for the upcoming ACCESS testing cycle. The department also convened its Bilingual Parent Advisory Committee to provide families with program updates and gather input on student needs. Bilingual staff collaborated with Viking teachers on co-teaching practices and met with building administrators to begin planning schedules for the upcoming cycle. Additionally, members of the department attended a Professional Learning Community (PLC) conference to further strengthen instructional practices and support for multilingual learners.

Mr. Esteban: The Technology Department reported that last month's phishing awareness campaign resulted in only 10 users clicking on the simulated phishing email, placing the district at a 3.48% phish-prone rate. While not the district's best performance, it represents the second-lowest rate recorded to date and reflects continued improvement in cybersecurity awareness. The department has also been preparing for upcoming e-learning days by organizing device bags, cables, and chargers for distribution. In addition, testing has begun on various digital platforms, including Google services and Facebook integrations, to ensure system readiness and reliable access for students and staff.

Dr. Correa reported that several administrators, instructional coaches, and teachers attended the Battelle for Kids Conference in October as part of the ongoing Portrait of a Graduate work. The team met last week to debrief the conference and identify next steps. He then invited Mr. Helfers, along with Principal Sarah Rosheger and teacher Kaitlin Kincaid, to share key takeaways.

Mr. Helfers noted that the district has attended the conference annually since 2019, expanding participation each year to deepen understanding and embed Portrait of a Graduate competencies throughout the organization. This year's team included six administrators, three instructional coaches, and four teachers. District 56 also showcased a banner highlighting the progress of its Portrait of a Graduate work, which prompted other districts—including an international team from Brazil—to seek insight from District 56 on its journey.

Ms. Kincaid shared reflections from teacher rounds, a practice designed to help teachers collaboratively identify challenges and improve instruction. Teachers from Spaulding and Prairie Trail developed a shared Problem of Practice focused on increasing student ownership and engagement in learning. She noted strong alignment between this work and all Portrait of a Graduate competencies, especially responsibility, motivation, and deeper engagement. She also highlighted the conference's emphasis on helping students understand their strengths and areas for growth as they explore future pathways.

Principal Rosheger discussed the development of a districtwide learning framework, created in partnership with Battelle for Kids. A team of 14 staff members—six administrators, four instructional coaches, and four teachers—will meet across four full-day sessions throughout the year. The learning framework will define District 56's local vision of deeper learning and align instructional practices to the Portrait of a Graduate competencies. The team has drafted a theory of action stating that intentional shifts in educator practice, supported by professional learning cycles, will lead to deeper learning experiences and increased demonstration of durable skills by all students.

Dr. Correa thanked the team for its leadership and emphasized that this work is foundational to the district's long-term instructional goals. He invited questions from the Board.

Every year, the Board of Education attends the Triple I Conference and appoints one Board Member to represent the District at the Delegate Assembly. The Board agreed to have Mark Pos be the delegate this year. The Board also provided him with direction on how the Board would like for him to vote on the resolutions to be brought before the Assembly. Dr. Correa provided his recommendations as well.

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 November 19, 2025, Board of Education meeting.

A Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request was received by Dr. Luis Correa via email on October 20, 2025, from Mr. Justin Wenig (Star Bridge FOIA Records) requesting public records detailing financial transactions made by Gurnee School District 56, reflecting all transactions from July 1, 2022, to the present date, including but not limited to: Purchase Order, Vendor Name, Description of goods/services purchased, Line item quantity, and Line item price/amount.

Mrs. Orozco responded to Mr. Wenig on October 24, 2025, via email with the requested information.

On a motion from Board President Pos with a second from Board Member Pahl, the Board voted to adopt the 2025 Tax Levy as presented and authorize the administration to file the requested Tax Levy with the Lake County Clerk in accordance with applicable state statutes. Roll Call: Ayes: Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Mandy Florip, and Germain Castellanos (via telephone).

On a motion from Board Member Florip with a second from Board Member Kotsinis, the Board voted to approve Board policies under review (Policies 4:100, 4:102, 4:110, 4:120, 4:130, 4:140, and 4:150) and to adopt those policies as presented by the administration. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, and Mandy Florip.

Dr. Correa presented to the Board of Education for first reading recommended new policies, Issue 120 October 2025, from the Illinois Association of School Boards. No Board action on these policies was necessary at this time.

Dr. Correa provided 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 4:160 and 4:165. The Board would officially approve the recommended changes at the next Board of Education meeting.

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 Garcia, the Board voted to adjourn open session at 5:45 p.m. The Board went into closed session at 5:46 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: Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Mandy Florip, and Germain Castellanos (via telephone).

The Board of Education came out of closed session at 6:42 p.m. on a motion from Board President Pos and seconded by Board Member Florip. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Mandy Florip, and Germain Castellanos (via telephone).

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

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 October 22, 2025, as presented. Roll Call: Ayes: Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Mandy Florip, and Germain Castellanos (via telephone).

A motion was made by Board Member Kotsinis and seconded by Board President Pos to adjourn the meeting at 6:45 p.m. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Mandy Florip, and Germain Castellanos (via telephone).

Respectfully submitted:

Mark Pos, President

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