

**Minutes of Gurnee School District 56
Board of Education Meeting
August 27, 2025**

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

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 & Grounds
Rachel Solomon, Director of Pupil Services
Miriam Torres, Multilingual & Assessment Coordinator
Principals: Dominique Geocariss, Jennifer Glickley, Sara Rosheger, 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.

Before the start of the board meeting, Mrs. Rosheger, Mrs. Waller, Mrs. Glickley, and Mrs. Geocariss introduced the new staff members to the Board of Education and the public, presenting the new hires for their respective Gurnee School District 56 buildings.

Spaulding: Abigail Bablitz, Stephanie Gorham, Hannah Jaros, Joy Stacey, Katie Welborn, Cynthia Guzman, Janelle Williams

Prairie Trail: Eleanor Barreca, Olivia Mallery, Kimberly Steele, Kristin Marks

River Trail: Alyssa Honcharuk, Meghan McMillen, Beth Voce, Anne Wills, Amanda Windom, Melissa Epstein

Viking: Candice Eagon, Andrew Freeman, Tegan Johnston, Catherine Polglaze, Dawn Steffens, Maryam Touati, Daisy Castro, Brian Tekampe, Isabel Iniguez.

Dr. Correa stated that he would ask Mr. Da Costa to introduce the new Business Department and District Office staff. Mr. Da Costa introduced:

District Office: Ana Londono, Ivette Ocampo, Elizabeth Panchi

Following the introductions, Board President Pos warmly welcomed all new staff members to Gurnee School District 56, including those joining the district office.

Board Member Kotsinis made a motion with a second from Board Member Castellanos to accept the minutes from the regular meeting on July 23, 2025, as presented. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, and Mandi Florip (via telephone).

The regular August 27, 2025, Treasurer's Report identified cash and investments of \$26,634,266.49. The Revenue Report identified receipts of \$ 644,531.10, and the Expenditure Report identified expenses totaling \$3,572,232.36. The cash balance in the Activity Fund for July was \$99,400.51. The Financial Reports, plus the Regular August (\$2,071,746.89) 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: Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, and Mandi Florip (via telephone).

During the *Public Participation* portion of the meeting, Margot Dirsmith, residing at 2936 N. Cypress Point, Wadsworth, IL 60083 (334-717-1262), addressed the Board with concerns regarding communication with the Transportation Department. She shared that she has two students who both attend Spaulding School and expressed concerns about the lack of updates on school bus drop-off and arrival times.

Ms. Dirsmith stated that the Versatrans My Stop application does not align with the pickup and drop-off times listed in Skyward and is not accurate in real time. She expressed concern for student safety and shared that, despite reaching out to the Transportation Department, she has not received a response. She was advised not to rely on the Versatrans My Stop application, but would like clearer communication regarding bus schedules moving forward.

Dr. Correa addressed the Board of Education and introduced Mrs. Rosher, Principal of Spaulding School, to present information about the Reading Power program, which will be implemented at Spaulding School for 1st and 2nd-grade students.

Before the presentation began, Dr. Correa invited Mrs. Solomon to speak. Mrs. Solomon gave credit to Board Member Becky Kotsinis for bringing this program to her attention and for taking the time to connect with her about the opportunity.

Mrs. Solomon then introduced the two representatives from Reading Power, who provided an informational presentation about the program. They explained that Reading Power provides one-to-one tutoring for students from Pre-K through 2nd grade during the school day. The representatives shared that they are excited to bring the program to Spaulding School this school year and will be working with approximately 30 students in 1st and 2nd grade.

They described how the tutoring sessions will focus on fluency and incorporate the science of reading. Each student will receive a workbook, and daily activities will be documented to track progress. Reading Power currently serves other community school districts, and the team

expressed their excitement to expand to Spaulding School, with the hope of adding River Trails School in the future.

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: Reading Power program for 1st and 2nd graders, first day of Teacher Institute Day, welcoming back students on the first day of school, students reciting the Spaulding Pledge, and the school theme for the year: *Stay Strong, Stay Connected*.

Prairie Trail School: Pictures of students working in circles, announcement of the reading theme for the school year, welcoming students on the first day of school, and hallway and classroom doors decorated to reflect the chosen reading theme.

Viking School: First day of school pictures, students participating in escape room activities during PE, and students acting as buddies to help new students transition and navigate Viking School.

River Trail School: First day of school, welcoming students, reading theme activities where students chose their favorite genres, characters, and book series, a parent-created welcome-back balloon display, students collaborating during circle time, and recognition of a River Trail student who entered and won a poetry contest at the Waukegan Public Library.

District: Dr. Correa shared that he and Mr. Helfer attended the Newport/Gurnee Library Back-to-School Fair and reported that it was a great event. He also presented pictures from the Summer Band Concert, photos of Board Members participating in the Gurnee Days Parade, and pictures from the new staff training sessions held earlier this month. In addition, Dr. Correa highlighted that two staff members, Jon Cejka and Jonathan Londono, won the first-ever Rib Eating Contest. Pictures were shown of Dr. Correa and Board Members enjoying the Gurnee Days Parade, including two photos taken before and after the rain.

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

Mr. Esteban: Reported that all teachers have been set up with the district's I-Tech systems. Mr. Esteban noted that Board Member meetings are now live-streamed and that ClassLink has been successfully launched. He shared that it has been a very busy summer but expressed satisfaction that all systems are running smoothly.

Ms. Torres: Met with the new one-way multilingual teacher and brought in a consultant to provide training on Spanish Language Arts standards. Ms. Torres also met with Viking teachers in small groups to continue training on the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) for

the school year. Ms. Torres developed a professional development plan, met with the middle school committee to present changes to report cards for the current school year, and shared that i-Ready testing will begin soon.

Mr. Smith: Reported that the Maintenance Department engaged an additional HVAC company to support district needs. The company's pricing structure is lower than what the district has paid in the past, and their technicians have received the necessary training. Mr. Smith walked the company through all district equipment, and the company is confident they can take on additional responsibilities. Mr. Smith also shared that the department is working with a new boiler tune-up partner offering the most competitive pricing to date. All parking lot repairs have been completed, and state requirements have been met.

Mrs. Solomon: Shared that the department provided training across the district on the "I Love U Guys" safety program. New hires and special education staff will also receive the training. Mrs. Solomon reported that the annual "Dilly Bar" event was a success.

Mr. Helfer: Spoke about the success of the new staff training and noted that this year saw a lower number of new hires, which is a positive sign of staff retention. Mr. Helfer's explained that planning for new staff onboarding began in February and welcomed 26 new staff members. The Instructional Team is ready to launch the Teacher Rounds program at all four schools.

Mr. Da Costa: Reported that the Business Department has been busy preparing the first payroll of the school year. Mr. Da Costa and the business department staff also met with new staff members to review insurance benefits and answer their questions.

Science Review 2025 – Presented by Pete Helfers

Mr. Helfer presented an overview of the Science Review conducted over the summer with 16 educators from across the district. Following the Illinois State Board of Education's Literacy Plan framework, the team began with a review of Illinois Science Assessment (ISA) and i-Ready data and agreed that instructional rigor must increase to match assessment expectations.

A new **mission statement** was developed: *Science education that inspires and equips all learners through essential science skills, highlighting the critical role science plays in shaping future opportunities as productive members of society.*

Three goals were identified: ensuring every student receives high-quality science instruction, supporting and preparing every educator to deliver it, and equipping leaders to sustain equitable conditions for science learning.

Action steps include creating a K–5 scope and sequence aligned with English/Language Arts, identifying priority standards for grades 6–8, and beginning unit design plans this fall to build a guaranteed and viable curriculum. The district will also evaluate and consider adopting new science resources during the 2025–26 school year

School Improvement Plans

Spaulding: Mrs. Rosher presented Spaulding School's School Improvement Plan for 2025–26, highlighting the theme “Start Strong, Stay Connected.”

The first goal focuses on academic achievement by ensuring all students meet or exceed grade-level standards in phonics (reading) and numbers and operations in base ten (math) as measured by i-Ready in Spring 2026. Key action steps include developing Champion Charts for phonics and math, using Common Formative Assessments, and providing differentiated instruction to support mastery.

The second goal emphasizes social-emotional learning through the consistent use of Positive Teacher Language—envisioning, reinforcing, reminding, and redirecting language—to strengthen adult-student relationships and create a supportive school community. Staff participated in Responsive Classroom training over the summer and will integrate these practices throughout the school year.

Both goals align with the district's strategic priorities of Modern and Effective Learning Design and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, with progress monitored through PLC meetings, data reviews, and student growth measures.

Prairie Trail: Mrs. Waller presented Prairie Trail School's School Improvement Plan for 2025–26, focusing on two major goals.

The first goal centers on academic achievement by implementing Universal Design for Learning (UDL) strategies schoolwide. All staff will receive professional development on multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression, with PLCs collaborating weekly to plan, share, and refine lessons. Progress will be monitored through staff and student surveys, peer walkthroughs, and classroom observations to ensure that all students can access grade-level standards and develop perseverance and goal-setting skills.

The second goal focuses on social-emotional learning by embedding Calm Classroom practices, Circles, SEL check-ins, and calm corners in every classroom to strengthen self-management and emotional regulation. Student progress will be measured using Panorama surveys and classroom data, with adjustments made to support strategies throughout the year.

River Trail: Mrs. Glickley presented River Trail School's School Improvement Plan for 2025–26, which focuses on increasing student engagement, stamina, and problem-solving skills through the use of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and the Deeper Learning Framework. Teachers will implement structures such as CHAMPS expectations, Daily 5 stamina-building routines, Kagan cooperative learning strategies, and student discourse techniques to foster collaboration and higher-level thinking. Progress will be measured through PLC documentation, peer observations, and growth on iReady reading vocabulary and math algebraic thinking assessments.

The second goal centers on social-emotional learning (SEL) by strengthening growth mindset instruction, weekly SEL lessons, class meetings, and restorative circles. Teachers will integrate strategies like Zones of Regulation, structured recess games, and peer mediation to help students build resilience, self-awareness, and problem-solving skills. The SIP team will monitor Panorama SEL data and behavior trends throughout the year to measure success

Viking: Mrs. Geocaris presented Viking Middle School's School Improvement Plan for 2025–26, which focuses on two key goals.

The first goal targets increased student proficiency in vocabulary on i-Ready assessments. Staff will receive professional learning on the SIOP model and Kagan structures to strengthen students' use of academic vocabulary and collaborative communication. PLC teams will review data regularly and use walkthrough feedback to refine instruction and increase engagement across all grade levels.

The second goal focuses on improving student responses on Panorama surveys related to communication, collaboration, and school climate. Staff will implement cooperative learning and SEL strategies, including daily SEL check-ins, advisory activities, and PBIS supports. Progress will be monitored using Panorama data, walkthrough observations, and student and staff feedback throughout the year.

Professional Leave – Odie Pahl, Federal Advocacy Conferences

A Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request was received by Dr. Correa on July 24, 2025, from Mr. Tom Rocco is requesting a copy of the contract information from Schrieder Asphalt Services that involves the resurfacing project at Viking Middle School. Specifically, the cover page executed a signature page, and any pages referring to prevailing wage requirements for the project.

Mrs. Orozco provided Mr. Rocco via email on July 29, 2025, a copy of the contract information from Schrieder Asphalt Services that involves the resurfacing project at Viking Middle School. Specifically, the cover page executed a signature page, and any pages referring to prevailing wage requirements for the project.

A Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request was received by Dr. Correa on August 19, 2025, from Mr. Jacob Long is requesting data of all current employees' names, job titles, and start dates.

Mrs. Orozco provided Mr. Long with the data of all current employees' names, job titles, and start dates via email on August 20, 2025.

Lake Division Meeting Announcement

Dr. Correa announced that Gurnee School District 56 will host the Lake Division Meeting at Prairie Trail School on October 8, 2025. Board Members were asked to notify Board Secretary Aurora Orozco if they plan to attend so she can register them for the event.

Dr. Correa presented to the Board of Education for first reading the recommended new policies, Issue 119, June 2025, from the Illinois Association of School Boards. No Board action on these policies was necessary at this time.

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

On a motion by Board Member Kotsinis and seconded by Board Member Castellanos, the Board voted to adjourn open session at 6:10 p.m. The Board went into closed session at 6:15 p.m. to discuss the following items on a roll call vote:

- The appointment, employment, compensation, discipline, performance, or dismissal of specific employees, specific individuals who serve as independent contractors in a park, recreational, or educational setting, or specific volunteers of the public body or legal counsel for the public body, including hearing testimony on a complaint lodged against an employee, a specific individual who serves as an independent contractor in a park, recreational, or educational setting, or a volunteer of the public body or against legal counsel for the public body to determine its validity. However, a meeting to consider an increase in compensation to a specific employee of a public body that is subject to the Local Government Wage Increase Transparency Act may not be closed and shall be open to the public and posted and held in accordance with this Act. 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(1).
- 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 public body has been filed and is pending before a court or administrative tribunal, or when the public body finds that an action is probable or imminent, in which case the basis for the finding shall be recorded and entered into the minutes of the closed meeting. 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(11).
- We need verbiage for the Board self-evaluation from the card.
- Discussion of minutes of meetings lawfully closed under the Open Meetings Act, 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: Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, and Mandi Florip (via telephone).

The Board of Education came out of closed session at 7:15 p.m. on a motion from Board President Pos and seconded by Board Member Garcia. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, and Mandi Florip (via telephone).

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

On a motion from Board President Pos with a second from Board Member Castellanos, the Board voted to approve closed session minutes for the meeting on July 23, 2025, as presented. Motion carried on a roll call vote Roll Call: Ayes: Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, and Mandi Florip (via telephone).

A motion was made by Member Kotsinis and seconded by Board President Pos to adjourn the meeting at 7:15 p.m. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Mandi Florip, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, and Cesar Garcia.

Respectfully submitted:

Mark Pos, President

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