

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

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 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
Sean Smith, Director of Facilities and Grounds
Rachel Solomon, Director of Pupil Services
Miriam Torres, Multilingual & Assessment Coordinator

Principals: Jen Glickley, Dominique Geocaris, Sara Roscheger, and Allison Waller
Aurora Orozco, Board Clerk

Public Hearing for a Holiday Waiver

Dr. Correa reported to the Board the necessity for a Holiday Waiver to be included with the 2025-2026 school calendar. School Code required that school districts that schedule a student attendance day on a holiday provide a public hearing to inform the community of this occurrence. The administration scheduled a student attendance day on Tuesday, November 11, 2025, which is Veterans' Day.

Public Hearing on the 2025-2026 Budget

Mr. Da Costa presented the FY26 final budget to the Board of Education and highlighted changes in the budget from the tentative budget he had presented on July 23, 2025.

During the *Public Participation* portion of the hearing, no one wished to address the Board of Education on the Holiday Waiver or the 2025-2026 Budget.

A motion was made by Board President Pos and seconded by Board Member Kotsinis to adjourn the public hearing at 5:15 p.m. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Jim Blockinger, Mandi Florip, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia and Mark Pos.

Board President Pos called the regular meeting to order at 5:15 p.m.

Board Member Blockinger made a motion with a second from Board Member Pahl to accept the minutes from the regular meeting on August 27, 2025, as presented.

Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Jim Blockinger, Mandi Florip, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia and Mark Pos.

The regular August 31, 2025, Treasurer's Report identified cash and investments of \$27,531,659.78. The Revenue Report identified receipts of \$2,073,376.16 and the Expenditure Report identified expenses totaling \$4,172,819.69. The cash balance in the Activity Fund for August was \$90,084.57. The Financial Reports plus the Revised August (\$647,179.00) and Regular September (\$1,760,178.28) Bills for Payment Reports were approved on a motion by Board Member Castellanos and seconded by Board Member Garcia. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Jim Blockinger, Mandi Florip, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia and Mark Pos.

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 School:

Students are currently focusing on *Pop Art* in art class. Auditions for the school musical *Beetlejuice* are underway and will include participation from both middle schools. Students are actively engaging in academic collaboration and community projects. Daily announcements are now being presented by students in Spanish.

River Trail School:

Staff members Mrs. Johnson and Mrs. Kahn added a fun touch with creative traffic safety costumes. The *Pathways Fair* was held recently, coordinated by instructional coaches, who shared effective classroom strategies. Teachers provided positive feedback and began implementing several strategies immediately. The *Back to School Kickback* event followed this year's theme, *Telling Your Story*, and featured a variety of student activities, as well as community resources provided by the Warren-Newport Public Library, Gurnee Police Department, and Gurnee Park District. Staff also created a lighthearted video featuring teachers using a slot machine as part of a motivational activity.

Prairie Trail School:

Staff and students are excited to begin club activities this year, with 297 slots already filled. Staff have been proactive in recruiting students through flyers and announcements. The school held a *PBIS Kick-Off Assembly* recognizing *Students of the Month*. Mrs. Greathouse organized lunchtime enrichment activities, allowing students to sing karaoke and participate in Thursday Night Football-themed games.

Spaulding School:

The school hosted its *PBIS Kick-Off* with staff dressed as superheroes to engage students. A new behavior matrix was introduced, and students enjoyed playground activities in the pleasant weather. Recess was adjusted into two 15-minute sessions—

one supervised by lunchroom monitors and the other by teachers—to enhance safety and supervision.

District Update – Mrs. Solomon:

The district hosted the “*I Love You Guys*” safety presentation, which was well-attended by 43 adults and their children. Attendees asked thoughtful questions, and representatives from the Gurnee Police and Fire Departments participated in the event. Additional information and photos will be shared in an upcoming edition of the *Viking Voice*.

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

Mr. Esteban – Technology Department

Mr. Esteban reported that technology recycling has been completed at all school buildings, including the proper disposal of old batteries. A phone system update is scheduled for Tuesday, September 24, 2025. The VARCO system update will begin at Viking School; if the testing is successful, updates will follow in all remaining buildings. In addition, the new Apple iOS release is currently being tested within the district network.

Mr. Smith – Buildings and Grounds

Mr. Smith shared that the Gurnee Fire Department completed the district-wide fire extinguisher inspection on October 1, 2025. The Regional Office of Education (ROE) will soon conduct its annual safety evaluation. The department has several maintenance candidates scheduled for interviews, with the goal of filling vacant positions. Mr. Smith also noted that he, along with Mr. Da Costa, Dr. Correa, and other team members, are collaborating with the kitchen staff to prepare an update that will be presented to the Board at the October meeting for review and approval.

Ms. Torres – Multilingual Department

Ms. Torres reported that the first multilingual meeting was held to discuss linguistic strategies and department goals. Staff received training on new resources to better support English learners across all content areas. The Title III grant, submitted at the start of the school year, has been approved. The department continues screening new students entering the district to determine eligibility for multilingual support services.

Mrs. Solomon – Safety and Community Engagement

Mrs. Solomon shared updates from recent stakeholder meetings and training sessions related to the “*I Love You Guys*” safety protocol, which will soon be implemented for all students. Both Mrs. Solomon and Mr. Sean attended training sessions hosted by the Regional Office of Education. The district has also introduced “*What If Wednesdays*”—an initiative designed to identify staff training needs related to safety drills. Lockdown and other safety drills have now begun across all schools.

Mr. Helfers – Curriculum and Instruction

Mr. Helfers stated that preparations are underway to launch two new curriculum areas in Science and Language Arts. He and the instructional coaches are working on Pathways reflections and reviewing the outcomes of recent new staff training sessions to ensure that new educators receive ongoing support and resources.

Mr. Da Costa provided an update on the district's banking transition from Advia Bank to Wintrust Bank. He reminded the Board that, as discussed in July, although credit unions can offer certain advantages, they are not FDIC-insured, and electronic payment processing would require a third-party vendor. He also noted challenges with Advia's remote customer service hours and time zone differences.

Mr. Da Costa announced that the district will host Wellness Screenings and Flu Shot Clinics on October 28 at River Trail School and on October 30 at Spaulding School.

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 September 17, 2025, Board of Education meeting.

Dr. Correa invited Board Member Ms. Odie Pahl to share her experience attending the *Federal Advocacy Conference* in Washington, D.C., earlier in September. Ms. Pahl spoke about the importance of networking and advocacy at the federal level and emphasized how mental health services and grant support are critical for Gurnee School District 56 students. She commended the event for its valuable insight into federal education initiatives.

Battelle for Kids Annual Event

Mr. Helfers presented information about the *Battelle for Kids Annual Event*. He explained that Gurnee School District 56 has collaborated with Battelle for Kids since 2018 to develop and enhance the *Portrait of a Graduate* initiative. Each year, the district refines this work to ensure it is meaningfully integrated into classroom practice. This year, more district staff were able to attend the event due to an increased grant allocation, supporting professional growth and continuous improvement. The district's partnership with Battelle has strengthened, and Gurnee School District 56 was invited to be highlighted at this year's event. A banner was presented to the Board in recognition of the district's progress. Mr. Helfers and Dr. Correa shared that positive developments continue across the district as the *Portrait of a Graduate* framework is successfully implemented.

A Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request was received by Dr. Luis Correa via email on September 2, 2025, from Mr. Owen Wang (Lake County Gazette), requesting the names and honors of all the students in Gurnee School District 56, high school students recognized by the College Board AP Scholars.

On September 2, 2025, Dr. Luis Correa responded to Mr. Wang via email, indicating that the request does not apply to Gurnee School District 56, as the district serves grades K-8.

A second Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request was received by Dr. Luis Correa via email on September 3, 2025, from Mr. Matt Stockwell (The Data Branch Research Team) is asking for all purchase orders issued by all departments, schools, divisions, or offices under Gurnee School District 56, including (but not limited to) general administration, curriculum and instruction, facilities and operations, food services, transportation, information technology, and finance/business office.

Requested Details:

- Purchase order number (or equivalent)
- Purchase date
- Vendor ID or name
- Department or issuing entity (if available)
- Line item description
- Quantity
- Unit price
- Total price

Mrs. Orozco responded to Mr. Stockwell via email on September 9, 2025, with the requested information.

A third Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request was received by Dr. Luis Correa via email on September 8, 2025, from Mr. Owen Wang (Lake County Gazette), requesting the names of all graduates from your middle schools for the completed school year, with the following fields:

Name

Destination High School

On September 9, 2025, Mrs. Orozco provided Mr. Wang with the requested information via email, fulfilling his FOIA request.

A fourth Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request was received by Dr. Luis Correa via email on September 8, 2025, from Mr. Owen Wang (Lake County Gazette) requesting the following records: copies of the contracts for all school principals in the district who will start the upcoming school year. And copies of all active teacher contracts/collective bargaining agreements.

Mrs. Orozco responded to Mr. Owen via email on September 9, 2025, with the requested information.

On a motion from Board Member Kotsinis with a second from Board Member Pahl, the Board voted to approve a student attendance day for Veterans Day on Tuesday, November 11, 2025, as presented at the public hearing on September 17, 2025. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Jim Blockinger, Mandi Florip, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia and Mark Pos.

On a motion from Board Member Blockinger with a second from Board Member Florip, the Board voted to approve the final FY26 Budget as presented at the public hearing on September 17, 2025. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Jim Blockinger, Mandi Florip, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia and Mark Pos.

On a motion from Board Member Florip with a second from Board President Pos, the Board voted to adopt the attached policies from PRESS Issue 119 June 2025 as presented by the administration. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Jim Blockinger, Mandi Florip, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia and Mark Pos.

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 2:2:30, 2:240, 2:250, 2:260, 2:265, 4:80, and 4:90. The Board would officially approve the recommended changes at the next Board of Education meeting.

Mr. Da Costa shared with the Board of Education the Administrator and Teacher Salary and Benefit Report. This report needed to be submitted to the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) prior to October 1st of each year after being approved by the Board of Education. The District was also required to publish the report on the District's website each year. On a motion from Board Member Kotsinis with a second from Board Member Garcia, the Board voted to approve the Administrator and Teacher Salary and Benefit Report with the discussed corrections. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Jim Blockinger, Mandi Florip, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia and Mark Pos.

Board Member Kotsinis made a motion to approve the following items as presented on the consent agenda. Board Member Pahl seconded the motion.

- Prairie Trail School PBIS Fundraising Request
- Prairie Trail School Great Americans People's Choice Fundraising Request
- Prairie Trail School Great Americans Spring Dance Fundraising Request
- DoReMi 50/50 Raffle Fundraising Request
- DoReMi Popcorn Fundraising Request
- Viking Middle School SSC Fall Dance Fundraising Request
- River Trail School SSC T-Shirt Fundraising Request
- Viking Middle School SSC Food Pantry Fundraising Request
- Viking Middle School SSC Chipotle Fundraising Request
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Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Jim Blockinger, Mandi Florip, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia and Mark Pos.

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

On a motion by Board Member Pahl and seconded by Board President Pos , the Board voted to adjourn open session at 5:58 p.m. The Board went into closed session at 6:03 pm. 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: Jim Blockinger, Mandi Florip, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia and Mark Pos.

The Board of Education came out of closed session at 6:15 p.m. on a motion from Board Member Florip and seconded by Board President Pos. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Jim Blockinger, Mandi Florip, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia and Mark Pos.

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: Jim Blockinger, Mandi Florip, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia and Mark Pos.

On a motion from Board Member Pahl with a second from Board Member Castellanos, the Board voted to approve closed session minutes for the meeting on August 27, 2025, as presented. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Jim Blockinger, Mandi Florip, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia and Mark Pos.

A motion was made by Board Member Kotsinis and seconded by Board Member Garcia to adjourn the meeting at 6:15 p.m. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Jim Blockinger, Mandi Florip, Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, and Mark Pos.

Respectfully submitted:

Mark Pos, President

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