

# THE PROUD 23 COMMUNITY Connection

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE PROSPECT HEIGHTS SCHOOL DISTRICT 23 COMMUNITY

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Dr. Don Angelaccio  
*Superintendent*

Dr. Amy Zaher  
*Asst. Superintendent  
for Curriculum and Instruction*

Amy McPartlin  
*Asst. Superintendent  
for Finance and Operations*

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## A FEW WORDS FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

Welcome to the first issue of School District 23's Community Connection newsletter! As we head into this new year that continues to present challenges but is also full of promise, I'm proud to reach out to residents to tell the story of our District and its four schools. I think it's important for the community to be up to date on our finances, facilities, accomplishments and the exciting work taking place in our schools every day.

District 23 has served this community for more than 150 years. Many generations have benefited from the high-quality instruction and innovative programs that are the hallmark of our District. I'm proud that we are able to continue this tradition of educational excellence today, thanks to our talented, dedicated administrative team and staff, supportive families and community members, and, of course, hardworking, passionate students.

Even over the past year, which has presented challenges unlike any other, we have managed to provide robust distance learning and flexible in-person instruction. We've done this by being steadfast in our efforts to balance four key priorities: health and safety of students and staff, quality instruction, impact on the community and sustainability. Now that many of our students are back in their school buildings, we continue to refine our planning and procedures to ensure we are doing our absolute best in each of these areas.

Every day, I am proud of our students and staff for being so adaptable and supportive of each other and for persevering through the many challenges. I'm also thankful to the families – I know it's not easy, but they have continued to be involved and supportive and have helped make our remote and hybrid models a success. In addition, I want to express gratitude to our School Board members, who have put in countless hours analyzing the situation and making tough decisions. The District 23 community has done a remarkable job of coming together and supporting one another, and I could not be more proud to see this in action.

As members of our community, whether you have students in the District or not, we want you to be proud of YOUR schools and the programs and services you support. Your investment in our public schools creates opportunities that inspire all students to grow as learners, individuals and citizens. I hope you enjoy our newsletter and that the stories on these pages will show you why we're so **PROUD TO BE D23!**

**Don Angelaccio Ed.D.**

Superintendent of Schools, Prospect Heights School District 23

**"WE WANT YOU TO  
BE PROUD OF YOUR  
SCHOOLS AND  
THE PROGRAMS AND  
SERVICES YOU SUPPORT!"**



Amy McPartlin

Much like in a household, a school district must operate within its budget to not only meet day-to-day needs but also anticipate and plan for future obligations. District 23 is proud that it has been able to accomplish this for many years and that it continues to be a responsible steward of the community's fiscal resources – even in these challenging financial times, according to Amy McPartlin, assistant superintendent for finance and operations. The District is guided by its strategic plan, which includes a goal that is a primary driver of financial decision making: *“Advance the effective use of resources to support safe, learner-ready facilities that maximize student learning.”*

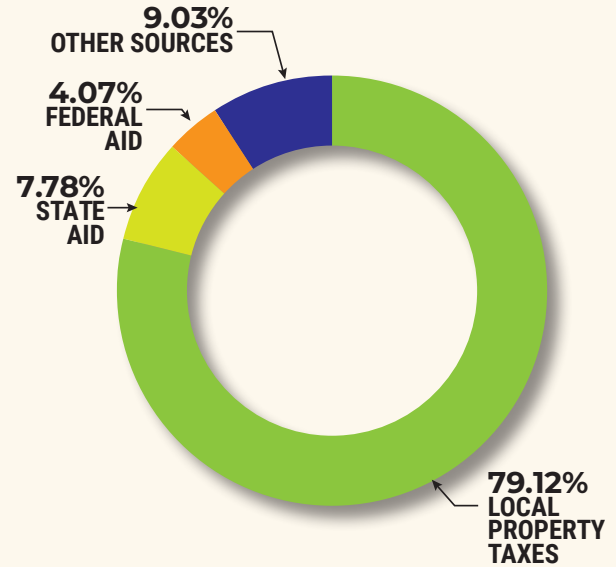
Illinois school districts continue to face many hurdles, including tax objections, unfunded mandates, diminishing General State Aid and anticipated pension reform. District 23 is not immune to these challenges and, like most districts, faces limited revenues and increasing expenses, McPartlin says. So while District administrators are proud of maintaining programs and facilities within budget parameters, they must prepare for possible limited state support and proposed cost shifts. That's why the District has developed a long-range financial and facilities plan to prioritize the use of funds in a proactive manner.

From a facilities perspective, District 23 has utilized a preventive maintenance approach to plan for larger expenditures that maximize the useful life of buildings and their components. Over the past few years, work at the schools has included improvements and repairs to paving and drainage, concrete, roofing and HVAC systems. In the coming years, the District will prioritize replacements of roofing, siding and windows.

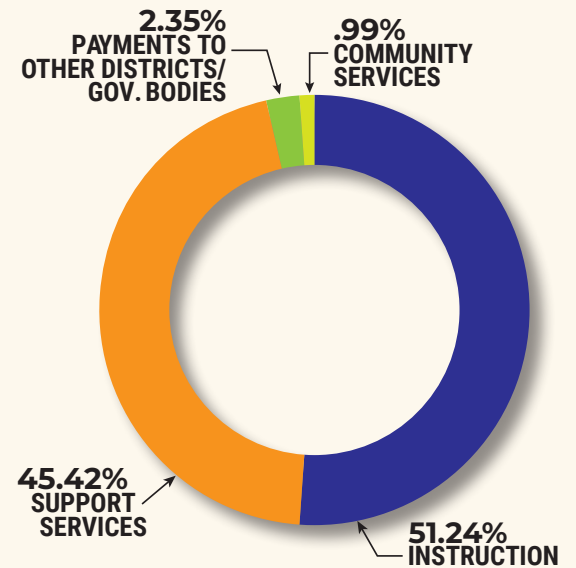
Overall, expenditures have largely remained balanced, with increases to personnel costs in accordance with negotiated agreements, and limited increases, if any, to the remaining budgeted line items. The School Board and District Administration continue to monitor revenues and expenditures, with a focus on sustainability. The Board works with Administration to evaluate current programming and identify services that need to be introduced or improved in order to enhance the educational experiences of students.

“District 23 continues to prioritize communication and transparency with all stakeholders and is fortunate to have a community that values the continuing investment in our students and in our District's future,” McPartlin says. “It's another reason we're proud to be D23!”

### REVENUE SOURCES



### WHERE DOES THE MONEY GO?



### MASKED UP AND READY TO LEARN: BUILDING CLASSROOM COMMUNITIES DURING COVID-19

This MacArthur Middle School class includes some students learning in person and some participating via livestream video. See Page 5 for more on District 23's response to COVID-19.



## PASSIONATE SULLIVAN AMBASSADORS MAKE A DIFFERENCE NEAR AND FAR

Sullivan Ambassadors, which have been leading local and global community service projects for more than 10 years, have not let COVID-19 get in the way of their mission to help others. They've continued their longstanding partnership with Aspired Living of Prospect Heights, making cards and recording themselves singing for the assisted living residents. They've also raised money to send D23 students to an e-learning camp. In addition to local efforts, past projects have included raising funds to purchase goats for a community in Africa and build a vocational training center in Haiti.



Library/media specialist Betsy Yager started Sullivan Ambassadors in 2009 and now works with bilingual teacher Nina Espinos and reading specialist Kelsey Paeth as advisors for the club. The group is now affiliated with we.org, which empowers youth through service-learning projects. There are two representatives from each classroom. "These kids are passionate and have many ideas every time we meet," Yager says. "They're in tune with what's going on and are concerned this is a hard time for people." Traci Meziere, Sullivan principal, adds that the advisors and students have been creative in finding ways to impact the community this year, even though they've only held virtual meetings. "I'm floored by what our kids are capable of," she says.

The Ambassadors are holding a food drive for the Wheeling Food Pantry in February. Non-perishable items can be dropped at the Anne Sullivan School entrance. (Pictured: An inspirational message that was part of a chalk drawing initiative sponsored by Sullivan Ambassadors during quarantine; fifth-grade Ambassadors and advisors meet via Zoom.)



## A REMOTE LEARNING TEACHING TACTIC THAT STICKS



Diane Moon, MacArthur math teacher, found a way to keep her seventh graders engaged during remote learning – putting stickers on her face every time a new

student participated. She got the idea from a viral TikTok video and turned it into a competition, with each of her classes trying to get the most stickers. Moon had thousands of educators respond when she shared her results on Twitter, and she even attracted the attention of The Washington Post and "Good Morning America," which featured her successful effort to connect with students!

## ROSS READERS HAVE EASY ACCESS TO GREAT BOOKS



Students were not able to visit their beloved school libraries during remote learning, but Betsy Ross School made sure they could still get their hands on good books. Library media specialist Kim Strachn created a landing page where students could select books with just one click, then do curbside pickup at the school. In addition, a book house was installed by the front entrance so families can grab or donate a book any time. The charming house was built by Ross occupational therapist Christie Stocking.

Now that many students are back in school, they can make selections from a book cart that visits each classroom. "With many libraries closed and fewer things for kids to do, we want to make it easy for them to experience the gift of reading," says principal Craig Curtis. (Pictured: Kim Strachn helps a student select a book.)





# MACARTHUR RECEIVES PRESTIGIOUS HONOR FOR ITS CULTURE OF INCLUSION



## Special Olympics

MacArthur Middle School has been named a Special Olympics Unified Champion School, for its efforts to create a climate of acceptance and inclusion. In a December ceremony, Dave Breen, Special Olympics Illinois president and CEO, unveiled a banner recognizing the school for meeting 10 standards of excellence and achieving the

national honor. Out of 340 Illinois schools participating in Unified programming, MacArthur is one of three to earn the distinction of being a National Banner school.

Schools that are part of the Special Olympics Unified program commit to empowering youth and educators to be leaders of change. At MacArthur, this includes advisory and PE classes that bring students with and without disabilities together, with student leaders creating and leading lessons for peers. Abbey Lynch, SAIL teacher and advisor for Unified programs, says "incredible friendships and leadership emerge from these classes." There are also extracurricular activities, such as Club Unify, Unified sports teams and Special Olympics participation each spring at Hersey High School.

Due to its leadership as an inclusive school, MacArthur has hosted a summit for area schools interested in creating their own programs. "Our students and staff have a perspective about honoring differences that is unlike anything I've seen," says principal Camron Nystrom, Ed.D. "Respect and

inclusion are embedded into everything we do."

Lynch says the District's other schools and families also deserve recognition, because the foundation is built in the early years. "Our District's students are truly special; these values are instilled within them way before they come to middle school."

Nystrom adds that MacArthur staff who work hard on Unified programs are deserving of the Special Olympics honor, as are the students who embrace the culture of inclusion. He says the programs provide a "deeper purpose" to students' days, helping them identify a passion for going to school that is in addition to learning and grades. "They are realizing how awesome it is to make a difference in someone's life."



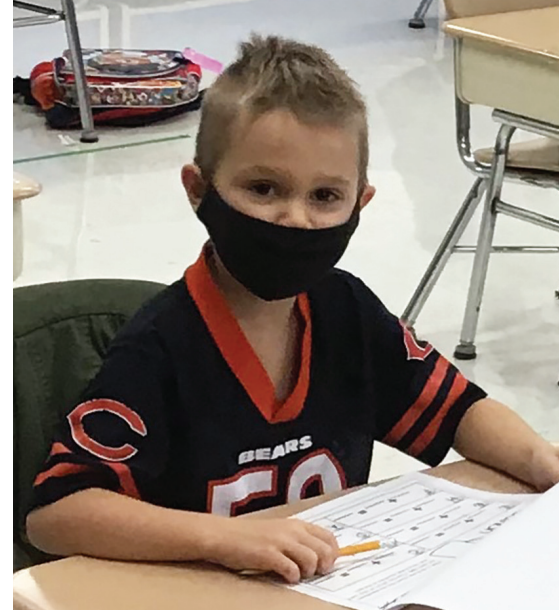
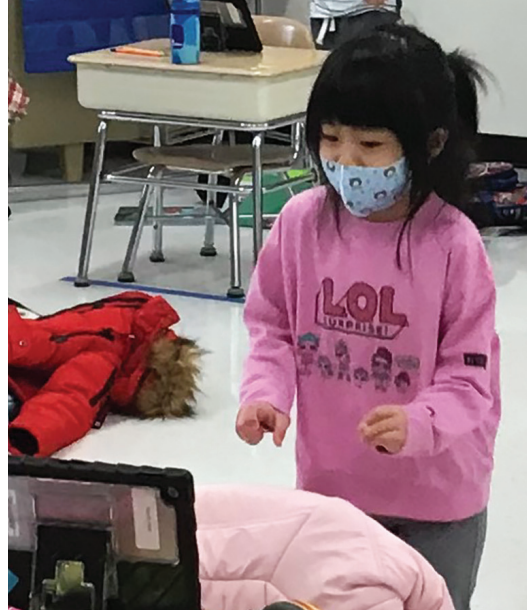
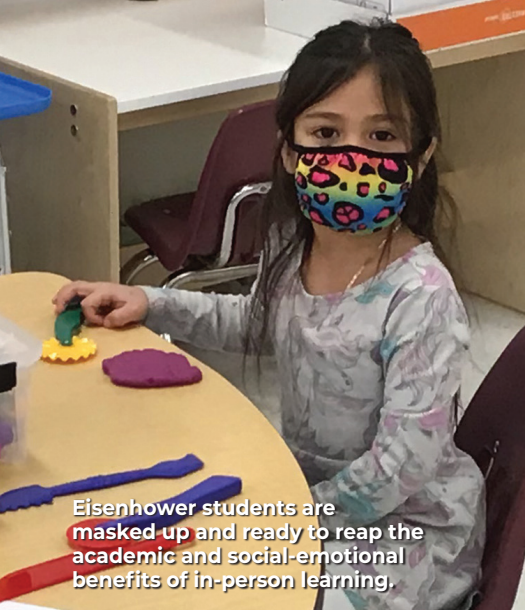
Scan this QR code to watch the December ceremony honoring MacArthur as a Special Olympics Unified Champion School:



### "OUR STUDENTS HAVE A PERSPECTIVE ABOUT HONORING DIFFERENCES THAT IS UNLIKE ANYTHING I'VE SEEN."



MacArthur's Unified soccer team brings students of all abilities together for fun, competition and an invaluable lesson on the importance of acceptance for all.



Eisenhower students are masked up and ready to reap the academic and social-emotional benefits of in-person learning.

## DISTRICT ENSURES YOUNGEST LEARNERS DON'T FALL BEHIND DURING COVID

The pandemic has presented daunting challenges to school districts, as they have worked to engage and motivate students while keeping everyone safe. Early on, as many districts were resorting to remote learning for all grade levels, District 23 recognized the urgent need to provide in-person instruction for its youngest students – particularly those already at risk who would be most likely to fall behind if COVID-19 kept them out of the classroom. So administrators prioritized getting Eisenhower School's pre-kindergarten through first-grade students back in the building.

The model has been a success, with nearly 70 percent of Eisenhower families selecting some or all in-person learning and those students spending a significant amount of time in their classrooms so far this school year, while wearing masks and following other precautions.

Targeted at-risk students, including those in Eisenhower's SAIL program, were the first to have in-person learning, starting in late August. More pre-k and kindergarten students started in September. First graders followed in October, along with all students who selected in-person learning. Just before Thanksgiving, everyone had to resume remote learning. But Eisenhower students started coming back in the building Jan. 11, followed by the other schools on the 19th.

"We've worked hard to have our young students in the school. We understand that for them, learning on devices for sustained hours can be an academic, physical and social-emotional challenge," says Luke Lambatos, Ed.D., Eisenhower principal. "We also recognize the strain it places on family members who must provide support." Lambatos adds that when the District's youngest students are

in school, they get used to a routine, develop relationships and learn to trust staff. He acknowledges, though, that these things can also be accomplished during remote learning – if the classroom experience is replicated.

"Our staff has put forth a Herculean effort to create vibrant communities that help children feel welcome and safe to share, whether they are in person or online," Lambatos says, adding that staff has had a growth mindset during this challenging time. The District has supported their journey by providing professional development and new online resources. Lambatos also credits students of all ages for "rising to the challenge and being highly adaptable."

To learn more about District 23's planning and response to COVID-19, scan this QR code:



## BACK-TO-SCHOOL BLUEPRINT

District 23 developed a Back-to-School Blueprint last summer that enabled families to choose between distance learning (from home) and hybrid (a combination of distance and in-person learning). All students moved to distance learning just before Thanksgiving, as the community's COVID-19 rates climbed. But those who opted for the hybrid model started returning to their classrooms in mid-January, closely following the District's precautions and procedures designed to keep everyone safe. The District's special education, at-risk and youngest students were the first to get back in the buildings in the fall and again in January — see story on this page. (Pictured: A Betsy Ross student reads with her classmates, those who are in the classroom with her as well as those who are livestream learning from home.)



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

### MacArthur Middle School

Grades 6-8  
Dr. Camron Nystrom, Principal  
Mr. Chris Alms, Asst. Principal

### Anne Sullivan Elementary

Grades 4-5  
Ms. Traci Meziere, Principal

### Betsy Ross Elementary

Grades 2-3  
Mr. Craig Curtis, Principal

### Eisenhower Elementary

Grades PreK-1  
Dr. Luke Lambatos, Principal

# WE'RE PROUD TO BE D23

1,502 ENROLLMENT



2 EXEMPLARY SCHOOLS  
2 COMMENDABLE SCHOOLS  
(Illinois Report Card)



91%  
PARENT  
SATISFACTION

ELEMENTARY STUDENTS PER TEACHER:

17:1 D23  
18:1 STATE AVERAGE



2 OUT OF 3  
TEACHERS WITH  
ADVANCED DEGREES

\$15,000  
D23 PER-PUPIL SPEND

\$14,492  
STATE PER-PUPIL SPEND



96%  
STUDENT ATTENDANCE RATE

