

**Minutes of Gurnee School District 56
Board of Education Meeting
April 22, 2026**

The following Board members were in attendance: Odie Pahl, Mark Pos, Cesar Garcia, Jim Blockinger, Becky Kotsinis, Mandi Florip (via telephone), 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 & Grounds
Rachel Solomon, Director of Student Services
Miriam Torres, Multilingual & Assessment Coordinator
Principals: Dominique Geocaris, Jen Glickley, 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 President Pos made a motion, seconded by Board Member Blockinger, to accept the minutes from the regular meeting on March 18, 2026, as presented. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Germain Castellanos, and Mandi Florip.

The regular March 31, 2026, Treasurer's Report identified cash and investments of \$21,890,279.58. The Revenue Report identified receipts of \$851,120.91, and the Expenditure Report identified expenses totaling \$4,057,270.87. The cash balance in the Activity Fund for March was \$124,123.36. The Financial Reports, plus the Revised March (\$2,104,967.81) and Regular April (\$1,272,620.42) Bills for Payment Reports, were approved on a motion by Board Member Blockinger and seconded by Board Member Pahl. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Germain Castellanos, and Mandi Florip.

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:

Spaulding: Spaulding staff participated in a late start professional learning session focused on social-emotional development through a book study on *The Power of Our*

Words. Classroom highlights included a first-grade interactive sight word activity and second-grade lessons on growth mindset and goal setting. The school also hosted a Preschool Family Night to support school readiness and engage families.

Prairie Trail: Prairie Trail students engaged in hands-on learning experiences, including a fourth-grade project exploring planets and space. The school also hosted a spring curriculum night aligned with its school improvement plan, featuring student performances and interactive family activities across various learning areas. Additionally, fourth-grade student leaders presented strategies to support self-management as part of the school's social-emotional learning goals.

River Trail: River Trail recognized a staff member for being named a Far North Region Teacher of the Year finalist and celebrated her accomplishments at a recent awards ceremony. Students engaged in a variety of hands-on learning experiences, including STEM projects, literature-based lessons, and creative activities such as stop-motion projects and problem-solving tasks. Students also participated in outdoor learning activities, including preparing the school garden for the spring season. The school hosted a student wellness event in partnership with the Chicago Bears, promoting physical activity and encouraging healthy habits, with strong family and volunteer participation.

Viking: Viking students participated in engaging classroom activities, including a sixth-grade language arts lesson focused on building empathy through literature and an eighth-grade math activity that emphasized problem-solving and collaboration. Students also created projects in advisory to share at an upcoming Asian American Pacific Islander celebration, which will include interactive activities.

Dr. Correa recognized staff members honored through the Village of Gurnee annual recognition program, including Teacher of the Year, Mrs. Betsy Sincora, and Support Staff of the Year, Mrs. Miriam Yaquian. These recognitions are awarded annually in collaboration with Woodland and Warren school districts, with this being the second year the program has included a support staff category. The staff members were recognized at River Trail, and a formal recognition ceremony will be held at the Village of Gurnee on May 4 at 7:00 p.m.

Board President Mark Pos commended staff for their effective communication through social media, noting that the shared updates and photos highlight positive student experiences and classroom activities. He stated that these efforts help keep both families and the broader community informed and engaged.

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

Mr. Da Costa: Mr. Da Costa provided an update on preparations for the upcoming insurance open enrollment, scheduled for May 18 through May 29. He reported that the

district received its renewal rates, with an overall increase of 3.4%, which was lower than that of other districts in the cooperative. The PPO plan increased by 1.7%, HMO plans increased by 11.9%, dental increased by 1.8%, and there were no increases for vision, life, or accidental insurance. Overall, the district's renewal rates were favorable compared to the average increases across participating districts.

Mr. Helfers: Mr. Helfers reported that River Trail hosted its annual Maker Fair, which was highly attended and well-received by the community. He also shared that the scope and sequence for the grades 3–5 science curriculum has been completed, with continued work planned for additional grade levels. Additionally, the district will pilot an updated version of the Superkids curriculum in select K–2 classrooms beginning in the fall, with staff training scheduled in July.

Mrs. Solomon: Ms. Solomon reported a busy month within Student Services, including participation in professional development focused on strengthening IEP goal writing and compliance practices. Staff also engaged with families during a preschool family engagement event, sharing information and resources. The team attended professional learning sessions related to the Preschool for All grant and its implementation. Additionally, the department collaborated with local businesses to establish an off-site location agreement for emergencies. Ms. Solomon also shared that the district will partner with SEDOL next year to support a self-contained classroom at Viking Middle School, with positive feedback from participating families and staff.

Ms. Torres: Ms. Torres reported that the department is updating the Continuous Quality Improvement Plan for Preschool for All and preparing it for submission to the state. The team also hosted its annual registration event for Spanish-speaking families and is preparing for the upcoming spring i-Ready assessment.

Mr. Smith: Mr. Smith reported that the department is preparing for summer facility inspections, including fire alarms, sprinklers, fire extinguishers, and backflow systems. Seasonal transitions are also underway, including decommissioning winter equipment and preparing cooling systems, while continuing to adjust building operations in response to changing weather conditions.

Mr. Esteban: Mr. Esteban reported on the district's recent phishing awareness campaign, noting a low click rate, reflecting increased staff awareness of cybersecurity practices. He also shared that the Transportation Department will be connected to the district network through ICN, providing internet access and reducing associated costs. Additionally, the Technology Department is working with a committee to evaluate new device options for middle school students.

Mr. Da Costa was in attendance to share with the Board of Education the status of the FY26 budget after the third quarter as of March 31, noting that 75% of the fiscal year has been completed. The district has received approximately 50% of expected revenues, slightly higher than the prior year, largely due to increased Evidence-Based Funding. Expenditures are generally on track, with variances related to the timing of debt service, insurance, and one-time costs such as negotiations and legal services. Capital projects are at 49%, debt service at 77%, and transportation at 60% of the annual budget, with personnel costs remaining on target. Overall, revenues have increased by approximately \$700,000, while expenditures have decreased by approximately \$1.68 million compared to the prior year.

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 April 22, 2026, Board of Education meeting.

A Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request was received by Dr. Luis Correa via email on March 18, 2026, from CT Mills requesting electronic copies of any existing records identifying the employee(s) responsible for leadership, oversight, or coordination of the following functional areas at the district or central office level: Curriculum & Instruction / Teaching & Learning, Career & Technical Education (CTE) and STEM, English Language Learner (ELL), Technology / Information Technology / Computer Science, Library / Media Services, Core Academic Subjects, including: English Language Arts (ELA), Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. For any responsive existing records, the requester asked that the following information be provided for each identified employee: Full Name, Official Job Title, District-Issued Work Email Address
Mrs. Orozco responded via email on March 26, 2026, to CT Mills with the requested information.

A second Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request was received by Dr. Luis Correa via email on March 17, 2026, from Mr. Justin Wenig (Star Bridge FOIA Records), requesting electronic copies for all executed contracts, purchase agreements, and purchase orders with Professional Learning/Development services, including any exhibits, addenda, or amendments that are in effect or have been in effect in the last 3 years. For purposes of this request, professional learning or professional development services include agreements with providers, publishers, vendors, or government entities that supply: Professional development, training, or coaching provided by a curriculum publisher as part of, or in connection with, a curriculum or instructional materials contract. Professional development, training, or coaching provided by a third-party vendor or service provider supporting curriculum implementation. Professional development, training, or coaching related to teaching content or instructional practice that supports classroom instruction. Professional learning, professional development, training, or instructional services provided by state agencies, state-affiliated organizations, regional education service agencies, regional education offices, or similar regional or state entities. Mrs. Orozco responded via email on April 6, 2026, to Mr. Wenig (Star Bridge FOIA Records) with the requested information.

A third Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request was received by Dr. Luis Correa via email on April 1, 2026, from Mr. Justin Wenig (Star Bridge FOIA Records), requesting electronic copies of all purchase orders and/or payment records for non-person/vendor entities, such as companies, organizations, or contractors, from January 1, 2025, to the current date. Records should include, at a minimum: purchase date, vendor name, line item description, line item quantity, and line item amount. Mrs. Orozco responded via email on April 6, 2026, to Mr. Wenig with the requested information.

A fourth Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request was received by Dr. Luis Correa via email on April 3, 2026, from Mrs. Oshea Smith (Sunlight Access), requesting an electronic summary of purchase orders (not the individual purchase orders themselves) issued by Gurnee School District 56 from 1/1/2022 through February 28, 2026. If available to include: Vendor name, Description of purchase or payment, Total price or amount paid. Mrs. Orozco responded to this request via email on April 6, 2026, and provided the requested information.

A fifth Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request was received by Dr. Luis Correa via email on April 7, 2026, from Mrs. Carla Carlos (Employee Research Data LLC, requesting the following information for district employees: First and last names, Job titles/positions, Work email addresses, and Primary campus or department. Mrs. Orozco responded via email on April 7, 2025, to Mrs. Carlos with the requested information.

On a motion from Board Member Kotsinis with a second from Board Member Pahl, the Board voted to approve Board policies under review (Policies 7:185, 7:190, 7:200, 7:210, 7:220, 7:230, and 7:240) and to adopt those policies as presented by the administration. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Germain Castellanos, and Mandi Florip.

Dr. Correa provided the Board of Education with 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 are 7:260, 7:270, 7:275, 7:280, 7:285, 7:290, and 7:300. The Board would officially approve the recommended changes at the next Board of Education meeting.

Mr. Pete presented to the Board of Education for approval of the Consolidated District Plan for District 56. The Consolidated District Plan provides an overview of how District 56 will allocate federal funds for the 2026-2027 school year.

Board Member Pahl made a motion to approve the Consolidated District Plan as presented by the administration. Board President Pos seconded the motion. Motion

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

Mr. Esteban was in attendance seeking Board approval to award a contract to 22Vets to recommend upgrading the district's network infrastructure, as current switches (installed between 2012 and 2018) are approaching end-of-life and no longer meet increasing technology demands. The project will improve reliability, capacity, security, and support centralized management through Cisco Meraki. The district is eligible for approximately 85% E-Rate funding for school buildings. Pending E-Rate approval, the administration recommends awarding the bid to 22Vets for \$44,272.57.

On a motion from Board Member Kotsinis with a second from Board Member Garcia, the Board voted to approve the bid received by 22Vets not to exceed \$44,272.57 for Cisco Meraki network infrastructure upgrades, as presented by the administration. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Germain Castellanos, and Mandi Florip.

Mr. Smith presented to the Board of Education the recommendation to award the contract for the 2026 Central Kitchen Addition at Prairie Trail Elementary School. Six bids were received on April 9, 2026, and after review by Wold Architects and Engineers, Kandu Construction, Inc. was identified as the lowest responsible bidder. The administration recommends awarding the base bid of \$2,876,000, along with Alternate No. 1 – Water Heater Replacement for \$15,000, for a total contract award of \$2,891,000.

On a motion from Board Member Blockinger with a second from Board President Pos, the Board voted to approve the bid results for the Central Kitchen Addition at Prairie Trail School construction project and award the contract to Kandu Construction, for \$2,891,000, which includes Alternate No.1 - Water Replacement for \$15,000, as presented by the administration. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Germain Castellanos, and Mandi Florip.

The band department submitted a proposal to run its Summer Lessons Program again this year at Viking Middle School. The program would consist of four lessons taught over four weeks and would cost \$100.00. The program would occur mid-June through mid-July. On a motion from Board Member Kotsinis with a second from Board Member Garcia, the Board voted to approve the summer band lessons program as presented by the administration. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Germain Castellanos, and Mandi Florip.

On a motion from Board President Mark with a second from Board Member Kotsinis, the Board voted to approve the final school calendar for 2025-2026 as presented by the administration. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Odie Pahl, Becky

Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Germain Castellanos, and Mandi Florip.

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

- Viking Middle School Student Service Council Fundraising Request
- River Trail School National Junior Honor Society Fundraising Request

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

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 President Pos, the Board voted to adjourn open session at 5:51 p.m. The Board went into closed session at 5:51 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, Germain Castellanos, and Mandi Florip.

The Board of Education came out of closed session at 6:21 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: Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Germain Castellanos, and Mandi Florip.

On a motion from Board Member Blockinger, with a second from Board Member Pahl, 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, Germain Castellanos, and Mandi Florip.

On a motion from Board President Pos with a second from Board Member Kotsinis, the Board voted to approve closed session minutes for the meeting on March 18, 2026, as presented. Roll Call: Ayes: Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Germain Castellanos, and Mandi Florip.

A motion was made by Board Member Kotsinis and seconded by Board President Pos to adjourn the meeting at 6:21 p.m. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, Jim Blockinger, Germain Castellanos, and Mandi Florip.

Respectfully submitted:

Mark Pos, President

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