

**Minutes of Gurnee School District 56
Board of Education Meeting
March 18, 2026**

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

Before the regular meeting, Board President Pos recognized and congratulated the Gurnee School District 56 Wrestling Team for qualifying for the state competition and presented certificates in honor of their achievement. The following students were recognized: Chrystian Hixson, Kayden Hudgins, and Benjamin Zienty.

Board Member Blockinger made a motion with a second from Board Member Castellanos to accept the minutes from the regular meeting on February 25, 2026, as presented. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, and Jim Blockinger.

The regular February 28, 2026, Treasurer's Report identified cash and investments of \$22,798,620.66. The Revenue Report identified receipts of \$792,990.24, and the Expenditure Report identified expenses totaling \$3,120,831.56. The cash balance in the Activity Fund for February was \$114,450.36. The Financial Reports, plus the Revised February (\$2,104,967.81) and Regular March (\$1,322,636.62) Bills for Payment Reports, were approved on a motion by Board Member Pahl and seconded by Board Member Kotsinis. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, and Jim Blockinger.

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: Viking Middle School highlighted several recent accomplishments. Three students qualified for the state wrestling competition, including a notable win at the state level. The seventh-grade girls' volleyball team won the conference championship, the program's first in 34 years. The seventh- and eighth-grade band and choir earned Division I ratings at the Illinois Grade School Music Association contest, advancing to state competition. Additional highlights included classroom learning activities, National Junior Honor Society locker decorations to support IAR testing, and a well-attended Student Council after-school open gym event.

River Trail: River Trail School shared several highlights from the past month. Middle school students participated in a bowling field trip as a culminating activity for their physical education unit. Two students, Talia and Amelia, represented River Trail at the ILMEA District 7 Elementary Music and Choir Festival. Students also participated in Pi Day activities, demonstrating strong memorization skills, with one student memorizing over 500 digits of pi. The school promoted anti-bullying efforts through student-led lessons and a schoolwide "Pink Out" event. Additionally, a fifth-grade class completed a service project focused on water conservation, raising funds to support the installation of a well in Nepal, providing clean water to a community in need.

Spaulding: Mrs. Glickley shared Spaulding School highlights on behalf of Mrs. Roscheeger. On February 26, Spaulding hosted a Black History Month celebration featuring student performances from various school groups, as well as guest presenters from the community. The event also included participation from local organizations and support from community partners. Additional highlights included a kindergarten field trip to the Greenbelt Cultural Center, where students learned about how animals survive during winter and participated in a guided nature hike. Preschool students, including those in the Structured Learning Classroom, participated in a water safety program provided through a partnership with the Park District. Staff expressed appreciation for the community partnerships that support hands-on learning opportunities for students.

Prairie Trail: Prairie Trail School shared several highlights, including student artwork being featured at the Adler Arts Center in Libertyville. Students also participated in a classroom reenactment of *Rip Van Winkle*, demonstrating strong engagement and participation. Fifth-grade students continued their "Great Americans" program, and students participated in a school dance that promoted school engagement. Classroom instruction highlights included project-based learning activities, where students explored various topics aligned with thematic units and student choice. The school also celebrated students through PBIS initiatives, including assemblies, "Donuts with Grownups," and interactive reward activities. Additionally, Prairie Trail hosted its annual reading challenge celebration, recognizing student participation and promoting literacy through student choice and engagement.

Rachel Solomon shared additional district highlights. Staff participated in a Cardiac Emergency Response Team (CERT) training at Viking Middle School, where a scenario-based tabletop exercise was used to practice response procedures and ensure staff readiness in the event of a cardiac emergency.

Dr. Correa shared additional district highlights, including images from the district's recent school play, which featured a creative performance centered on modern themes and storytelling. The production incorporated unique elements, including a podcast-style format, and demonstrated strong student engagement and creativity. Additional highlights included a Prairie Trail Singers Club performance, which served as a culminating event for participating students and provided an opportunity for families to attend and celebrate student learning. Dr. Correa also highlighted the Reading Power program at Spaulding School, where volunteers provide one-on-one reading support to students multiple times per week. The program currently serves approximately 90 students and has shown strong student engagement, growth in reading skills, and meaningful connections between students and mentors. The district is exploring opportunities to expand the program based on its success.

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 reported that the district has begun receiving preliminary insurance renewal rates. The initial workers' compensation renewal reflects a decrease of approximately 8.41%. While rates are still preliminary, this reduction was noted as a positive outcome compared to increases experienced by other districts within the cooperative. Mr. Da Costa recognized the efforts of the maintenance, custodial, and transportation teams for their commitment to safe practices, as well as all staff members whose daily attention to safety contributes to reducing workplace incidents and controlling costs. Final renewal figures are expected later in the spring.

Mr. Helfers: Mr. Helfers reported on several curriculum and instruction initiatives. The district adjusted the advanced placement timeline by administering the CogAT assessment earlier in the school year, allowing for improved data collection and more efficient placement decisions while reducing end-of-year testing demands. Mr. Helfers also highlighted the implementation of teacher rounds across buildings, where educators collaborate by observing classroom practices, providing feedback, and working together to improve instructional strategies aligned to district goals. Additionally, the department is actively preparing for the upcoming school year, including ordering instructional materials and planning professional development to support staff and student success.

Mrs. Solomon: Mrs. Solomon reported a busy month for the Special Education department. Planning is underway to support the implementation of Cardiac Emergency Response Team (CERT) training across all buildings. Mrs. Solomon attended the Lake County Regional Office of Education job fair and participated in transition planning for students receiving special education services as they move between buildings and prepare for high school. Additional highlights included stakeholder meetings with staff, parents, and community members, participation in a regional conference, and collaboration with community partners to support programming such as water safety

initiatives. The department also hosted a professional development session for Lake County Special Education Directors and Assistant Superintendents.

Ms. Torres: Mrs. Torres reported that the district's Title III Intent to Apply has been submitted and approved, allowing the district to proceed with completing the Title III grant application. Mrs. Torres also noted that the department is currently administering required state assessments, including the ACCESS for ELLs and the Illinois Science Assessment, along with ongoing Illinois Assessment of Readiness testing.

Mr. Smith: Mr. Smith reported that the district is working with its insurance provider on a roof replacement over the locker room at River Trail due to hail damage. Mr. Smith also shared that kitchen project bidding documents will be available to contractors, with a pre-bid walkthrough scheduled for March 27 and bid opening on April 9. A recommendation for the lowest responsible bidder will be presented to the Board of Education at a future meeting.

Mr. Esteban: Mr. Esteban reported that E-rate bid submissions are due on March 23, with a proposal expected to be presented to the Board next month. Mr. Esteban also shared that preparations are underway for spring break projects, including replacing an outdated projector in the transportation building with an interactive panel and upgraded audio system. Additionally, district-issued phones for administrators and directors have been upgraded to priority service, allowing for improved communication access during emergencies.

On a motion from Board Member Castellanos with a second from Board Member Kotsinis, the Board voted to approve Board policies under review (Policies 6:290, 6:340, 7:150, 7:160, 7:170, and 7:180) and to adopt those policies as presented by the administration. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Motion carried on a roll call vote Roll Call: Ayes: Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, and Jim Blockinger.

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 7:185, 7:190, 7:200, 7:210, 7:220, 7:230, and 7:240. The Board would officially approve the recommended changes at the next Board of Education meeting.

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 PBIS Fundraising Request
- River Trail School, Mrs. Biabani's 5th Grade Science Class Fundraising Request
- Viking Middle School Student Service Council Fundraising Request

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

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 Odie, the Board voted to adjourn open session at 5:33 p.m. The Board went into closed session at 5:34 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: Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, and Jim Blockinger.

The Board of Education came out of closed session at 6:02 p.m. on a motion from Board President Pos and seconded by Board Member Blockinger. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, and Jim Blockinger.

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

On a motion from Board Member Kotsinis with a second from Board President Pos, the Board voted to approve closed session minutes for the meeting on February 25, 2026, as presented. Roll Call: Ayes: Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, and Jim Blockinger.

A motion was made by Board Member Kotsinis and seconded by Board Member Pahl to adjourn the meeting 6:02 p.m. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Germain Castellanos, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, Mark Pos, and Jim Blockinger.

Respectfully submitted:

Mark Pos, President

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