

LEARNERS

A Newsletter for the Winnetka Community of Learners



FALL 2015

THE WINNETKA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

www.winnetka36.org

BUILDING A COMMUNITY OF READERS

Carleton Washburne once wrote, “If one learns to read easily, one is delighted with the new acquisition, wants to read more, grows in reading ability, and reads more and more, progressing as he does so.” Washburne’s philosophy on developing strong readers aligns with current best practice by offering students a rich variety of experiences and pairing them with books to match their readiness and interests. Engaging our students by connecting the stories they read to their own lives, and empowering them to express their thoughts, evokes a desire to continue to grow and read.

For instance, throughout the school year, sixth grade language arts classes at The Skokie School spend time independently reading books of their choice. The students then convene to write about what they read, and share their insights with their peers. This method of reading, coupled with written response, provides the opportunity for students to think critically, articulate insights, and communicate with one another. Our teachers strive to get to know students as readers in order to help select texts that will inspire them to be more fluent, as well as create a community where reading is valued and celebrated. The goal is to develop lifelong readers.

While reading and writing strategies grow in sophistication from Kindergarten through eighth grade, District educators believe that students at all levels appreciate being

Students at Hubbard Woods School (l) and Greeley School (r) reading books of their choice during the first week of school. Bottom photo: The Skokie School teacher, Peggy Hoyt, guides a student as he crafts a written response after participating in independent reading time.



challenged. Peggy Hoyt, sixth grade language arts teacher, shares, “Reading takes practice. Set high expectations and hold the students accountable. Kids will fall in love with reading when they are confident readers.”

The District is continuing its partnership with the Columbia University Teachers College as it finalizes a reading curriculum review this school year.

Fostering a literacy-rich education provides students with the tools to grow in all subject areas, from comprehending the complex language of math, to communicating ideas through the visual arts, to learning a world language. Building a strong sense of literacy in our students creates deep thinkers and problem solvers – critical motivators to helping learners reach their potential.

**CROW ISLAND SCHOOL,
the nation's first elementary
school built specifically
from a child's perspective,
is celebrating its 75th
Anniversary in 2015.**



Originally designed by Perkins+Will in 1940, the building is on the National Register of Historic Places as well as a National Historic Landmark. "Crow Island School has served thousands of families in its 75-year history. We are honored that the unique, student-centered design of this building has been a prototype for many other schools internationally," says District 36 Superintendent Trisha Kocanda.

Crow Island School was originally constructed on the site of a wooded island in the midst of what was once a swamp. Named by students for the crows that once gathered on the island, the school is adjacent to Crow Island Woods. Each classroom has access to an outdoor courtyard, where teaching and learning often occur. Details throughout the building, from the placement of door knobs and light switches to the height of the benches in the auditorium, are specifically geared towards children. One of the world's first "jungle gyms" is located at the school's playground. Architecture and education scholars from around the world visit Crow Island School annually.

A committee of parents, friends and former students planned a Homecoming Weekend in early October. According to Dr. Julie Pfeffer, Principal, "It was lovely to gather both alumni and current families together to celebrate the Crow Island community."



Images above: Students celebrate Crow Island School's 75th birthday on October 2, 2015. Vintage chairs, original to the building, serve as a gathering place for students and visitors. Students paint outside of the school in this historic image.



This metal sculpture on the school grounds was designed and built by Winnetka sculptor, Max Fleisher.



Kindergarten students expressing creativity at Crow Island School. To view more photos, visit www.winnetka36.org/crowisland/photogallery.

SUPERINTENDENT'S MESSAGE

Trisha Kocanda
Superintendent

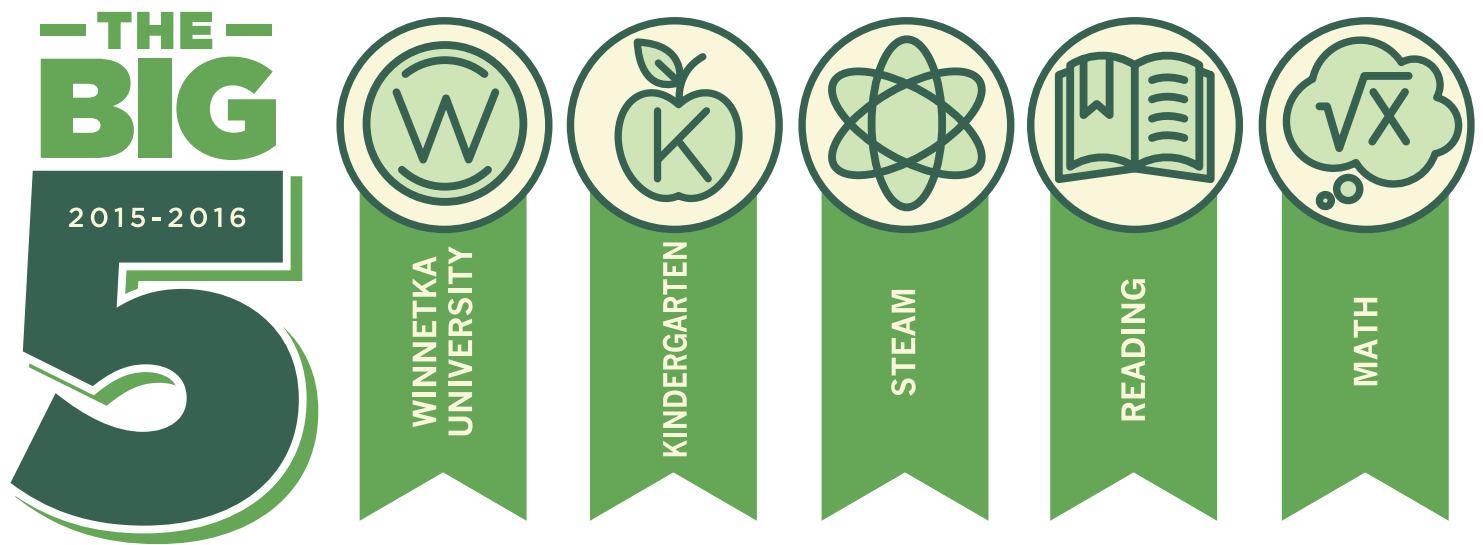


There is an unmistakable energy this time of year. As F. Scott Fitzgerald writes in *The Great Gatsby*, “Life starts all over again when it gets crisp in the fall.” This is indeed a momentous season for us in District 36. Hubbard Woods School celebrates 100 years of serving students. Crow Island School, internationally regarded for its child-centered design, turns 75 this year. While the beloved Crow Island Pioneer Room continues to thrive as an integral part of our third grade social studies curriculum, Hubbard Woods students now program robots in the new IDEA Lab. It is a purposeful blend of tradition and innovation.

As a District, our energy is focused on the “Big 5” priorities identified from my Superintendent’s Entry Plan findings. With over 200 hours spent last school year collaborating with community members, parents, teachers and students, we are moving forward with common goals and an emerging shared vision. The “Big 5” priorities this year include an extended day Kindergarten feasibility study, the launch of Winnetka University (a state-of-the-art professional education system for our staff), and a focus on Reading,

Math, and STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math).

The heart of what we do in all of our schools remains teaching and learning. We strive to maintain our philosophical roots while innovating for the future. In this issue of LEARNERS, you will catch a glimpse of day-to-day classroom experiences, as well as the strategy behind experiential learning in District 36. I would like to thank the Winnetka community for its enthusiasm and continued support of our schools.



HUBBARD WOODS SCHOOL TURNS 100

On September 8, 2015, Dr. Daniel Ryan, Principal, led students in singing “Happy Birthday” to Hubbard Woods School, kicking off a year of festivities including the launch of the new IDEA Lab as well as a 100th birthday party for the community in May.



BOARD PRESIDENT MESSAGE

Kendra Wallace
Board President



The 2015-2016 school year is off to an exciting start. STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math) prototype environments have transformed the Resource Center at Hubbard Woods School (currently known as the IDEA Lab) and are being offered as an elective at Carleton Washburne School. The Skokie School has expanded its MakerSpace program to include more computer coding and design challenges. Board Members are looking forward to observing these experiential programs in action, as well as spending time with our youngest learners in Kindergarten, as we evaluate the possibility of offering an extended day program.

Newly elected Board Members Kristen Hertel, Dawn Livingston, and Jennifer Pehlke, have spent their first few months of service engaged in state mandated professional development and new Board member orientation. They have also had the benefit of being mentored by former Board Members, Jon Kaplan, William Meuer, and Tom Shannon. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Jon, Bill, and Tom, for their dedication, commitment, and countless hours of service.

On behalf of the School Board, thank you for providing a supportive community for our students. We recognize the trust you have placed in us to educate our youngest citizens and serve as responsible stewards of taxpayers' investment.

This issue of *Learners* is dedicated to examining how literacy is exemplified in our schools. As a Board, we are committed to ensuring that our students are literate in many ways, including conceptual understanding and fluency in mathematics, communicating in other languages, reading “just right” books, and developing digital literacy in their use of technology.

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY TEACHERS COLLEGE LEADS READING INSTITUTE IN DISTRICT 36

Over 70 District educators participated in a four-day Reading Institute facilitated by Columbia University's Teachers College in August 2015. During this professional learning experience, teachers engaged with best practice reading instruction. Collaborative exercises focused on instructional strategies, assessment practices, and differentiation. Breakout sessions were organized by specific grade levels, so teachers throughout the District were able to learn together.

District 36 teachers have an insightful group discussion led by an instructor from Columbia University's Teachers College.



MASTERING THE LANGUAGE OF MATH

“Math is fantastic and beautiful. If you miss out on the content of math...your life is not as rich as it could be,” says Steven Strogatz, professor of applied mathematics at Cornell University, in a recent article in *The Atlantic*. “Beautiful” is not necessarily a word that most Americans would use to describe math. Approximately 25 percent of four year college students admit to experiencing math anxiety; many studies show that this disenchantment with math begins early.¹

In District 36, the goal is to address this potential challenge by using engaging classroom communication methods to increase understanding and reasoning. Math is presented as a cohesive language rather than a series of unrelated, abstract ideas. Fundamental concepts are built upon with a differentiated approach, providing students with the tools to solve more complex mathematical problems and increase their math literacy and reasoning skills as they advance from grade to grade. For instance, what students learn about multiplicative relationships in third and fourth grades leads to an understanding of ratio and proportional relationships in sixth grade, which contributes to the comprehension of linear functions and graphing in seventh and eighth grade.

In the classroom, students are encouraged to problem solve and ask questions rather than simply memorize facts. This may include interactive games and student-led presentations that connect increasingly complex math problems with real-life scenarios. Students may approach equations in different ways but are then challenged to explain their rationale to their peers, sharing the steps they have taken to arrive at their answers. Ultimately, the goal is for



students to be able to demonstrate both procedural and conceptual fluency so they are prepared for the rigors of higher level math.

Throughout summer 2015, over 200 hours were spent on curriculum work in District 36. Over 50% of these hours focused directly on math in an effort to continually incorporate best practices to prepare students to be fluent in the language of math. In order to collaborate with colleagues, District 36 actively participates in the Township Math Articulation Committee. The group regularly meets to communicate on curricular changes, and serves as a forum for math discussion regarding educational materials and teaching methods.

Teachers from The Skokie School recently partnered with a former student, District 36 alumna Ellen Whitesides, on a yearlong team project on Ratio and Proportional Relationships for Illustrative Mathematics, a community of educators that provides guidance to states, districts, and curriculum and assessment writers working to improve mathematics education. Whitesides, a graduate of Colby College and Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government, currently teaches mathematics and statistics at Harvard University. She handpicked the Winnetka educators to collaborate on this national initiative. According to Whitesides, **“In my work with mathematics teachers across the U.S., I hold on to an image of an ideal classroom, formed from my own education in The Winnetka Public Schools. The experiential learning that I lived on a daily basis as a child at Greeley and Washburne fed my curiosity, taught me to love mathematics, and formed the standard I hold up and help teachers work toward today.”**



Image at left: Crow Island School students count together, learning basic math fundamentals in a hands-on manner. Image at top: Carleton Washburne School students problem-solve during a math exercise.

¡BRAVO! WORLD LANGUAGE

The ability to communicate in another language is “Like having two different voices,” says seventh grader Elliana M. In 2012, the World Language program was redesigned to include the goal of functional language proficiency; our community and staff wanted our students to be more confident and comfortable with speaking another language. The Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) in Washington D.C., supported the redesign and helped District 36 set three-year programmatic goals. New teaching methods were implemented to establish an enhanced classroom environment that allows students to access the language in a way that is comprehensible and relevant. For instance, on an afternoon in September, Señora Shapiro's class at Greeley School roared with laughter as students acted out a play featuring “Dr. Noodle,” a crazy scissors-wielding scientist who wants to cut the leaves off of a rare, smelly plant at the Chicago Botanic Garden. Inspired by a recent news item, the teacher elicited creative details from her students to personalize the story, which is entirely in Spanish.

Images on this page: Students in Señora Shapiro's class at Greeley School perform a play entirely in Spanish. Crow Island School students during an active class vocabulary exercise. During class, students are able to read books in their target language to increase comprehension and fluency.

Since the redesign, District 36 has consistently exceeded its goals on the Spanish SOPA (Student Oral Proficiency Assessment), a nationally normed language proficiency assessment administered by CAL (see chart on opposite page). In response, the curriculum is refined annually to meet the advanced needs of the students. District 36 educators are selected to present at national conferences and mentor peers by regularly hosting observers and workshops.

Students in District 36 begin studying Spanish 90 minutes per week in first through fifth grade. By sixth grade, most students are daily immersed in either Spanish or French. They interact with their teachers and classmates in a fluid, conversational manner that incorporates high-frequency vocabulary and uses storytelling coupled with costumes and props. Reading to enhance literacy in the students' target language is also a greater focus since the program revision. Through these techniques, students grow in proficiency and acquisition.





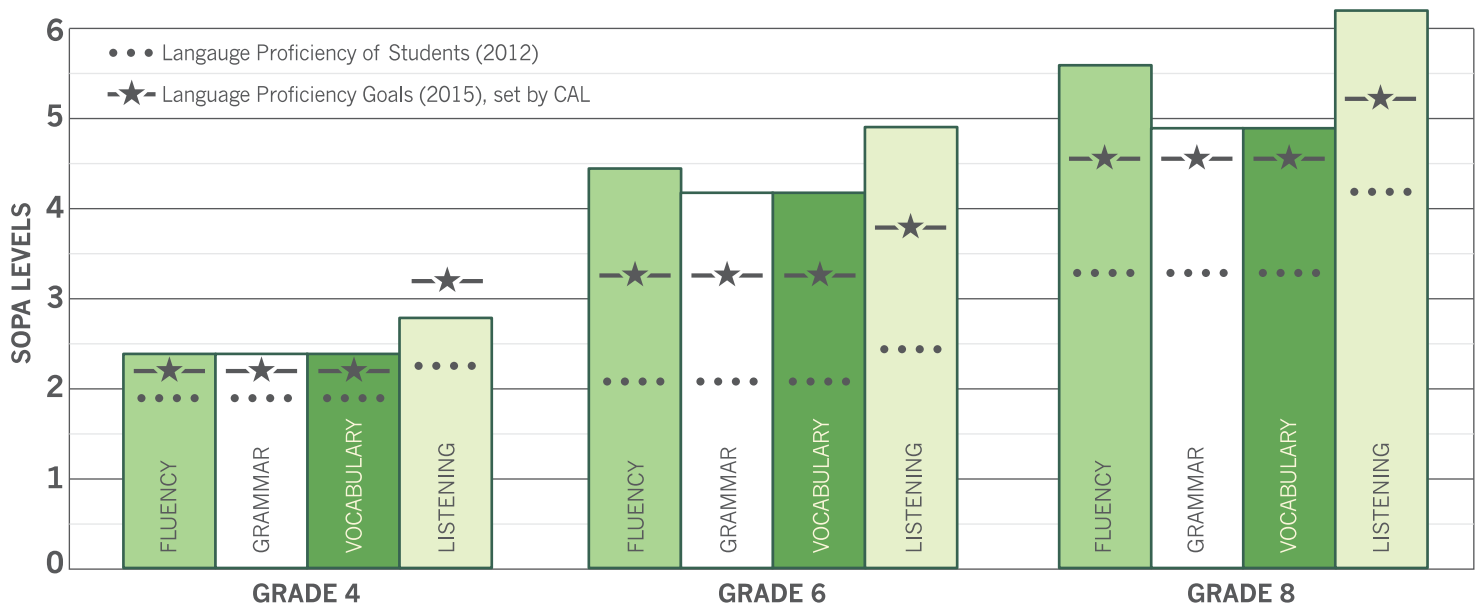
Above and at right: Maestra Laux's students at Carleton Washburne School spend time speaking, reading and writing entirely in Spanish.



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Day-to-day activities are infused with developmentally appropriate themes that are often student-driven. "We collaborate with our kids and incorporate their ideas...the point is to communicate and have fun with the language. That's when acquisition happens unconsciously," says Shapiro, who has taught Spanish at Greeley School for nearly 23 years. "Our vision is to empower students to communicate beyond the classroom and to feel confident enough to do so," says Maestra Faith Laux, Spanish teacher at Carleton Washburne School.

2015 STUDENT ORAL PROFICIENCY ASSESSMENT (SOPA) RESULTS



SOPA Levels = 1) Jr. Novice – Low, 2) Jr. Novice – Mid, 3) Jr. Novice – High, 4) Jr. Intermediate – Low, 5) Jr. Intermediate – Mid, 6) Jr. Intermediate – High

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**COMMUNITY
VOICES:**

**Tell Us About
Your World
Language
Experience**

**“It is fun to be
able to speak two
languages and
have two ways of
communicating!”**

Elliana M., Carleton Washburne
School seventh grade student



**“I felt prepared to enter
Spanish at New Trier with
confidence due to the World
Language Program's suc-
cess. As someone hoping to
study Spanish in college and
use it throughout my life,
hopefully as a teacher of
both English and Spanish, I
am eternally grateful to my**

**teachers
and the
program.”**

Meredith Falk,
Freshman at
Northwestern
University and
District 36 alumna



**“We spoke and communicated only in French from
the first day, despite the fact that we all made some
mistakes. We were also able to
comprehend, read and author stories,
make videos, and learn about French
culture. This environment allowed it to
be both easy and enjoyable to learn.”**

Lucas Balon, Freshman at New Trier High School and District 36 alumnus

