

LEARNERS

A Newsletter for the Winnetka Community of Learners



SPRING 2015

THE WINNETKA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

www.winnetka36.org

INSPIRING INNOVATION

This issue of *Learners* will provide a glimpse into many of the innovative teaching and learning experiences happening in The Winnetka Public Schools today. District 36 strives not only to provide an excellent education for all students so that each reaches his/her full potential, but also to continually improve and serve as a model for others.

The key to continuous improvement is centered on innovation, one of the core values identified in the Strategic Plan. *“Innovators are imbued with a purpose, style of behavior, and attitude that allows them to create something of original value, make a difference, or change a process, service, system, or way of thinking.”*¹ We believe that both Winnetka educators and students are innovators.

Our practices must meet the needs of a generation of children who were born into a digital age. While student learning goals—inspiring leadership, instilling a quest for life-long learning, and developing the key skills required for success in high school and beyond—have not wavered, today’s classroom experience reflects the latest educational research and incorporates technological advances.

We encourage our teachers to be educational leaders, willing to create new pathways for student learning; this produces results in the classroom. Students who are meaningfully challenged to think and reason, not merely to recite facts and recall answers, build a sense of self-efficacy. Students with a strong sense of efficacy are more likely to challenge themselves



Students use 3-D printers and a variety of materials to build projects and prototypes in classes, electives, and clubs. Innovative processes like these encourage persistence and creative thinking.

with difficult tasks, be intrinsically motivated, and recover quickly from setbacks; qualities useful in every phase of life.

Appropriate use of technology is an important facet of innovation in education. While the Mobile Learning Initiative provides access to tablets and computers and allows students to explore all curricular areas in deeper, more individualized ways, it is equally important for them to be able to tinker with materials and technology in creative open-ended ways. Students and teachers are partnering to create new types of learning spaces that will foster technological thinking and innovation. These spaces are only at the initial stages of development, affording the District many opportunities for expansion and innovation.

Student innovators must be collaborative, resilient, responsible citizens of our global community. Meeting the social and emotional needs of students and encouraging them to problem solve in positive and healthy ways, builds skills that are essential for success both in and out of the classroom.

Students with a strong sense of efficacy are more likely to challenge themselves with difficult tasks, be intrinsically motivated, and recover quickly from setbacks; qualities useful in every phase of life.

¹ Source: Harvard innovation researcher Tony Wagner.

SCIENCE OLYMPIAD

Student scientists from The Skokie School and Carleton Washburne School participate in the Science Olympiad, a club open to all who are interested. Some compete in events that require them to work together to devise solutions to scientific questions in timed situations. Others build models prior to Science Olympiad Meets and test these prototypes at the competition site.

Students report that this combination of cooperation and competition, "is thought-provoking, educational, and fun!" This year they have been exploring genetics, crime forensics, earth science, chemistry, anatomy, physics, geology, and mechanical engineering.



District 36 includes three K–4 elementary schools (Crow Island School, Greeley School, and Hubbard Woods School); one fifth/sixth grade center (The Skokie School); and one seventh/eighth grade building (Carleton Washburne School).

Demographic information for the District follows, along with comparisons to State averages where applicable. The information is taken from the 2014 Illinois School Report Card.

1795
Students

166
Teachers

19 (State: 21)
Average Class Size

88% Students Meeting/Exceeding Standards:
ISAT Reading (State: 57%)

88% Students Meeting/Exceeding Standards:
ISAT Math (State: 60%)

96% Locally Funded
(State: 66%)

\$10,990
Per Student Instructional
Spending (State: \$7,094)

\$19,362
Per Student Operational
Spending (State: \$12,045)

16% (State: 14%)
Students with
Disabilities

1% (State: 10%)
English Learners

SUPERINTENDENT'S MESSAGE

During my first six months as Superintendent of The Winnetka Public Schools, I have been listening and learning while connecting with the Board, community, parents, staff, students, PTOs, and the Winnetka Public Schools Foundation. The findings of this work will be the basis of my Entry Plan—a roadmap for the next several years that will reflect current priorities and a refinement of Strategic Plan goals.

One message that I have heard time and again, is the great sense of pride the community has in our schools. Both children and adults appreciate the District's experiential approach to learning, our rich history, and the accomplishments of our students. In short, the Winnetka Experience is an important part of the Village's appeal. On a recent Village survey, 78% of residents reported that good schools are one of the reasons that they live in Winnetka. This was second only to community safety (82%).¹

The Winnetka Experience encompasses our deep roots in progressive education and our commitment to continued innovation. It includes the ambitious goal of educating the whole child and meeting each learner's needs so all who enter our classrooms grow academically, emotionally, and socially. It also reflects ways to engage today's students and prepare them to be global citizens. To be successful contributors, our students must be innovators, creators of information, flexible thinkers, and effective communicators. Instilling these qualities in our young learners is something we take seriously.

I look forward to continued collaboration with the Winnetka community to set a shared vision, one that is inspirational, long-term, and challenging to achieve. The 2012–2017 Strategic Plan was front-loaded to ensure immediate



Trisha Kocanda
Superintendent

priorities were met. Much of that groundwork is complete. The remaining years are designated for refinement and big dreams. We are eager to begin the next phase of that work and to make sure the Winnetka Experience is one that continues to engage and challenge today's students.

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Below: Superintendent Kocanda meeting with students during the Entry Planning process. She also gathered input from the Board, community members, parents, staff, students, the PTOs, and the Winnetka Public Schools Foundation.



¹ Source: Village of Winnetka 2014 Citizen Survey.

BOARD PRESIDENT MESSAGE

Kendra Wallace
Board President



The most important task of the School Board is to ensure long-term educational excellence for the children of Winnetka. This includes hiring a superintendent who leads the District and serving as responsible stewards of taxpayer dollars.

It is with great pleasure that I report that thanks to the efforts of our dedicated staff and the leadership of Superintendent, Trisha Kocanda, we are meeting these goals. After serving as Assistant Superintendent, Ms. Kocanda, stepped into the Superintendent's role last July. In the past six months, she has built upon the existing positive relationships she had with the administrative team, Board, parents, and staff; developed working partnerships with Village and Township leaders; and proven to be an effective leader.

A great deal has been accomplished on the financial front as well. The Board and the Winnetka Education Association (WEA), the collective bargaining unit for the District teachers and teaching associates, agreed to the terms of a five-year contract in November. This extended agreement will provide years of continuity and support.

The Board and administrative team are in the process of implementing the financial recommendations that were adopted last year. These included reducing operating fund balances, reducing bond debt, and reducing taxes.

- **Reduced taxes in 2013 via an abatement that returned \$2 million to taxpayers.**
- **Approved a \$3 million reduction (8%) to the 2014 tax levy.**

These actions are in keeping with our ongoing commitment to ask taxpayers for only what is necessary to support the District's strong educational programs and to maintain facilities.

The first half of the 2014–2015 school year has been busy and productive and I look forward to more of the same in the months to ahead. I welcome you to join us at monthly Board meetings so you can learn more about our schools and hear discussions on key curricular and financial issues.

FIVE-YEAR CONTRACT APPROVED

Last November, The Winnetka Public Schools Board of Education and The Winnetka Education Association (WEA) agreed on terms for a five-year contract that will run through August 31, 2019. Bargaining teams for the School Board and the WEA worked together with the shared goal of crafting an agreement that will continue to provide students with high-quality educational experiences. This extended agreement will also ensure years of continuity and support for the community, staff, and students.

Salary increases over the life of the contract average 4.88% annually. The overall cost increase, when factoring in all features of the contract, is 3%. This is aligned with the School Board's financial philosophy. The agreement calls for two additional workdays per year for teachers that will be dedicated to professional development, as well as further participation by employees in the cost of health insurance. The salaries are competitive within New Trier Township while meeting the financial goals established by the Board.

Crow Island School 75th Anniversary

Plans are underway for Crow Island School's 75th Anniversary celebration. It will be held October 2-4, 2015. Alums and staff can learn more and join the mailing list at crowisland75th.wordpress.com. Please share this information with friends and family who may be interested.



SCHOOL BUDGET

The District’s budget is a planning document that provides the financial framework to support The Winnetka Public Schools’ goal of providing students with a high-caliber education, while serving as responsible financial stewards. Revenue is generated primarily from local property tax dollars, while expenses are determined by programmatic needs.

Board and staff are diligent about careful stewardship of these funds and work to deliver educational programs and maintain District buildings as efficiently as possible. This may result in surpluses, or positive ending fund balances. When savings are realized, funds are held in reserve, not spent on discretionary items. A healthy budget extends the time between referenda, ensures cash flow when tax payments are not received in a timely fashion, and may be used for unexpected expenses.

Developing and monitoring the District’s budget is a year-round activity, incorporating an array of logistical, legal, and regulatory mandates.

Updates are presented monthly at open Board meetings where there are multiple opportunities for public comment. In order for the Board to thoughtfully consider community input, comments and feedback should be received before budget items are placed on the voting agenda. The agenda and budget materials are posted one day prior to Board meetings.

School Budget Cycle

- JANUARY**
Budget Calendar Developed

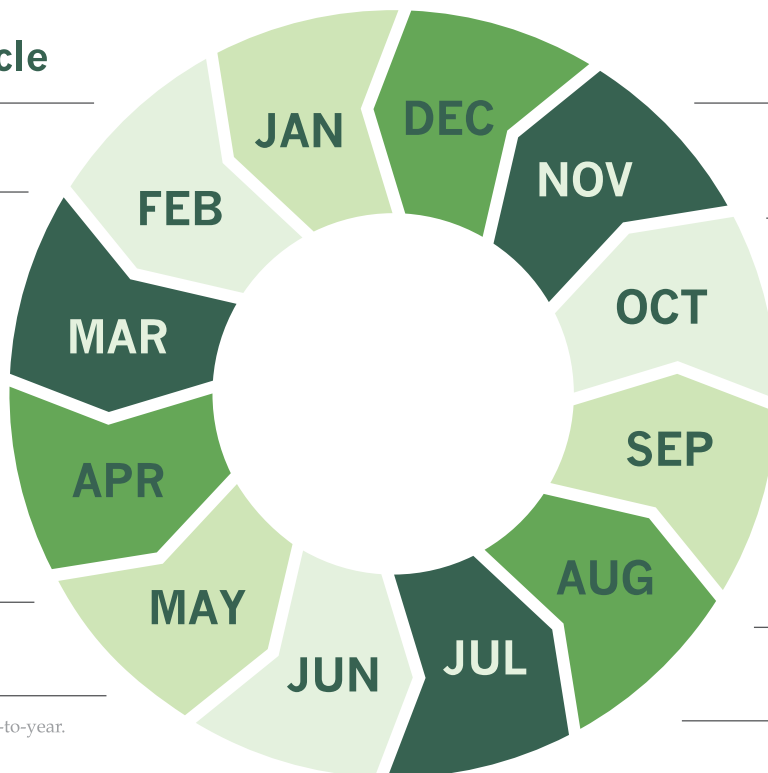
- FEBRUARY**
Preliminary Staffing Plan Presented

- MARCH**
Staffing Plan Adopted

- APRIL**
–

- MAY**
Draft Budget Prepared and Presented

- JUNE**
Tentative Budget Adopted



- JULY**
Tentative Budget on Public Display

- AUGUST**
Tentative Budget Adopted

- SEPTEMBER**
Budget Hearing and Vote

- OCTOBER**
Independent Financial Audit Presented

- NOVEMBER**
Preliminary Tax Levy Presented and Discussed

- DECEMBER**
Tax Levy Approved

Note: Timing may vary slightly from year-to-year.

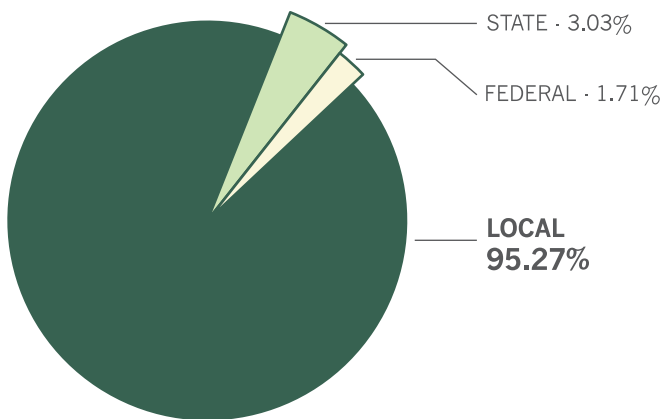
2013–2014 FINANCIAL REPORT

Thanks to the support of taxpayers and the careful stewardship of the School Board and staff, District 36 finances are stable and solid. The District's AAA Bond Rating from Standard and Poor's was renewed, and the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) bestowed its highest honor, "Financial Recognition," on The Winnetka Public Schools.

Expenditures for FY 2014 decreased by just under 1%. This speaks to the District's vigilance in controlling expenses, spending money wisely, and trust within the system that resources will be used as needed to support educational programs, not simply because funds are available.

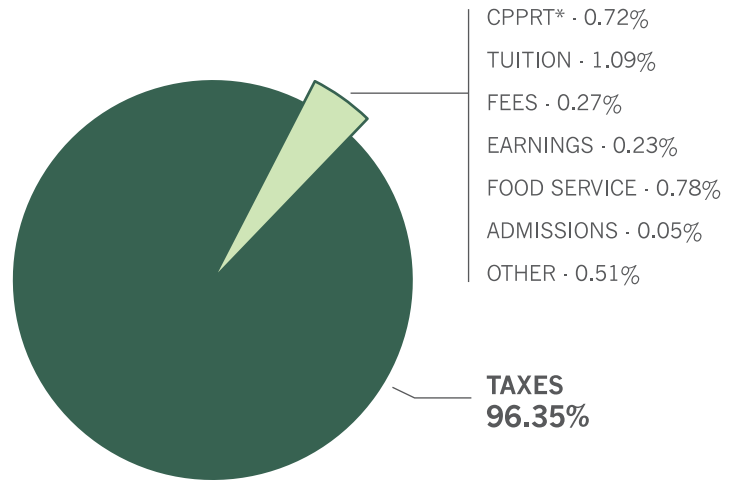
Revenue by Source (All Funds)

The Winnetka Public Schools District 36 receives 95% of its funds from local sources. Federal and State revenues add less than 5% to the District's revenue stream. Despite the financial crisis in the State of Illinois, District finances have remained stable. The District's federal dollars were higher in FY2014 because of the timing of payments.



Local Revenue by Type (All Funds)

Property taxes are the primary source (96%) of local revenue for The Winnetka Public Schools. Local revenues are used for our community's children unlike some tax dollars which are used elsewhere.



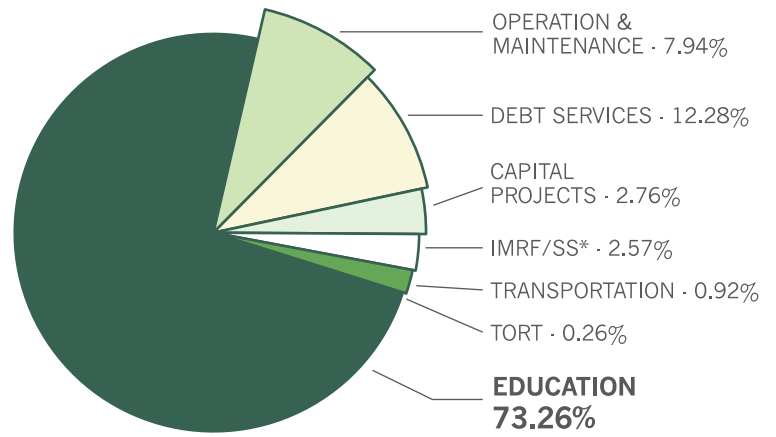
* Corporate Personal Property Replacement Tax

The Winnetka Public Schools Board approved the District's 2014 Tax Levy at their December 16, 2014, meeting. A property tax levy is an annual request to Cook County for the property tax revenue a school district needs to operate the district for the subsequent fiscal year.

The Board approved a \$3 million reduction to the 2014 levy versus 2013. This represents a decrease of 8% from \$37,235,000 to \$34,235,000. This reduction will provide both immediate and long-term tax relief and address the accrual of surpluses.

Expenditure by Fund

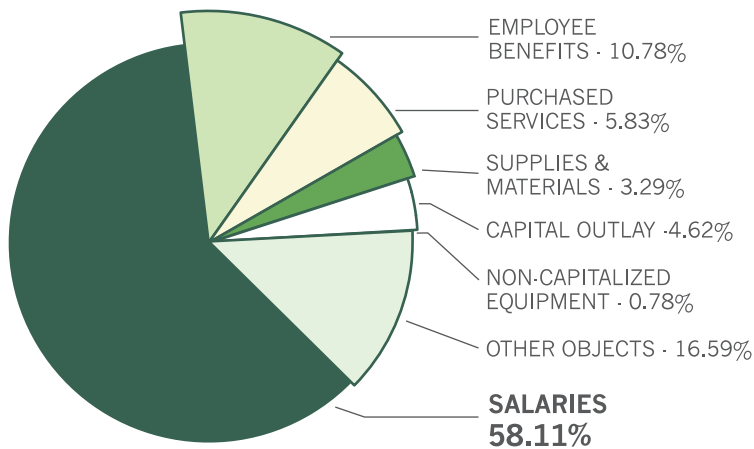
Per Illinois State Law, the District's budget is divided into categories, or funds. Each of these accounts has a specific purpose or function and funds are not fungible. Only limited types of transfers are permitted, and money in one fund cannot be used for expenses in another. For example, the District spent more than 12% of its local dollars on debt service. Efforts are underway to pay this debt early to save the taxpayers money.



* Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund and Social Security

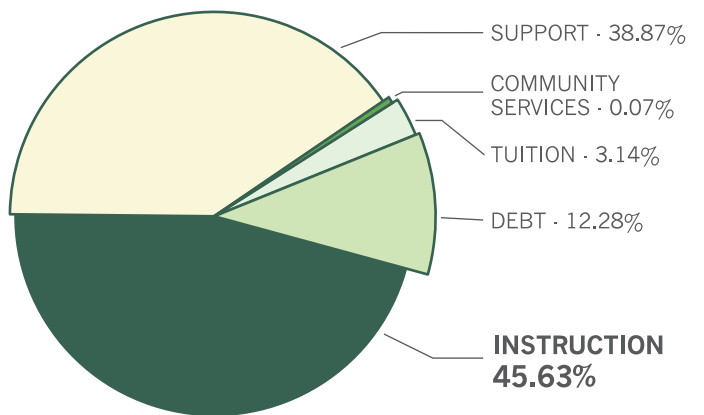
Expenditure by Object (All Funds)

When expenditures are considered by type they are referred to as objects. Education is a people-driven enterprise. Salaries and benefits of teachers, associates, custodians, and other staff—those who provide outstanding educational experiences for students—constitute the majority (58%) of expenses.



Instruction Takes Priority

District Budget priorities are guided by the singular goal of providing the best possible education for the children of Winnetka while remaining fiscally responsible. This priority is reflected by how much money is devoted to teaching and learning. Just under half of the District's budget (46%) is spent on Instruction. Instructional support, including transportation and building upkeep, comprises 39% of expenditures.



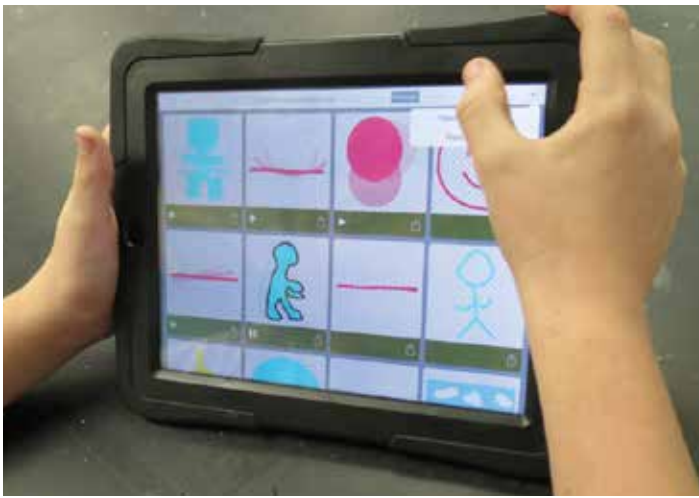
AAA Bond Rating

Credit ratings are opinions about the ability of an entity, such as a corporation, state or city government, to meet its financial obligations. Since 2008, The Winnetka Public Schools has received Standard and Poor's highest rating. District 36 is one of 77 districts nationwide to be rated AAA in 2014.

Financial Recognition

The Winnetka Public Schools received a "Recognition" distinction from the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). This represents the highest category of financial strength. District 36 received a score of 3.80 on a 4.0 scale for several consecutive years.

District 36 received perfect scores from the ISBE in the categories of Fund Balance/Revenue Ratio, Expenditures/Revenue Ratio, Days Cash on Hand, and Short-Term Borrowing.



FULL STEAM AHEAD

The deeply entwined fields of Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math (STEAM) are critical to student success. District staff has taken a leadership role in these areas and encouraged students to do the same.

SCIENCE teachers from The Skokie and Carleton Washburne Schools presented Flipped Classrooms and Implementing Next Generation Science Standards at the National Science Teachers Association Conference. District students are extending their science learning by participating in the Science Olympiad.

TECHNOLOGY Director, Maureen Chertow Miller, served as the conference co-chair for the Illinois Computing Educators Conference. A team of Hubbard Woods School students attended one of the sessions, while students from The Skokie School presented at the Students Involved with Technology (SIT) Conference.

Images above: Both concrete and virtual materials are used in visual arts classes.

ENGINEERING and **ART** intersect in the increasingly important arena of computer coding. All District students were introduced to coding through International Hour of Code events last fall and have opportunities to build on these skills throughout the year in classes and clubs.

MATH teachers from The Skokie School have been working with Illustrative Mathematics, a consortium dedicated to the coherent learning of mathematics. Their work demonstrates clear connections between high quality professional learning, classroom instruction, and assessment. Carleton Washburne School students have been using these math skills at the Latin School and Regina math competitions.

Images below: Communicating with others in the classroom, at conferences, and in competitions encourages students to build leadership skills.



MOBILE LEARNING

The District's Mobile Learning Initiative (MLI) launched in September. The program was piloted in District classrooms last year. Students in Grades 5-8 have each been provided with iPads, while students in Grades K-4 share devices that are stored on carts and moved between classrooms.

Technology is a tool for transforming teaching and learning. By connecting technology and curriculum, we can promote purposeful use of the iPads and other devices available to students. In this inaugural year of the MLI, staff from all departments and schools are collaborating to:

- **Integrate technology-rich components into day-to-day classroom activities.**
- **Increase opportunities for students to explore 21st century topics including computer coding and design engineering.**
- **Measure and demonstrate how the initiative enhances student creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and communication.**
- **Ensure that students are responsible digital citizens.**

FLIPPED SCIENCE CLASSROOMS—At Carleton Washburne School teachers prepare video demonstrations about how to set up labs and use equipment. Students view these at home during time that would traditionally be devoted to homework so more in-class time can be devoted to lab work, projects, and discussion. Flipped classrooms also allow for differentiation—students have the opportunity to

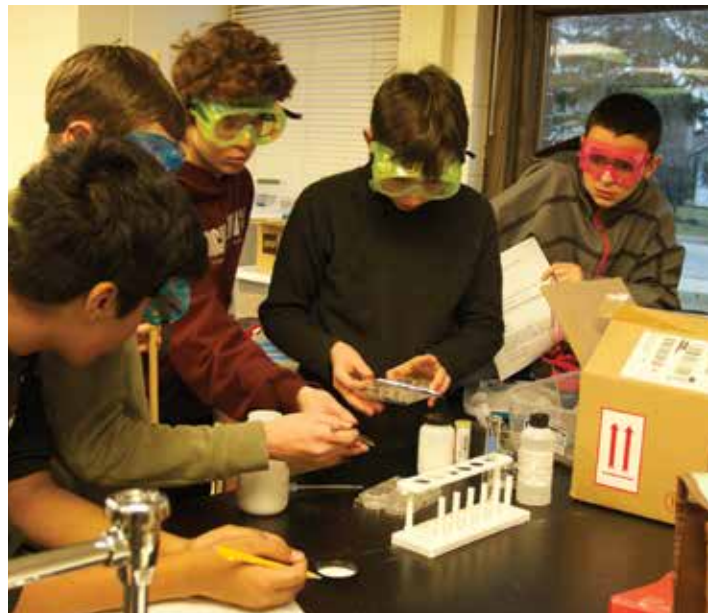
watch the videos and review the directions at their own pace and multiple times if necessary.

MIDDLE SCHOOL MAKER SPACE—Fifth and sixth grade students access The Skokie School's Maker Space for classes and during their free periods. This combination computer lab, workshop, and studio space is equipped with 3-D printers and design supplies. One of the most compelling aspects of this collaborative learning environment is creating a culture where novices learn from each other. Students have created stop motion animation, learned programming and coding skills, and are experimenting with robotics.

INFORMED ASSESSMENT—Math is a balance between computation, thinking, and demonstrating understanding. It is more essential than ever for teachers to understand how each student approaches math and analyze their problem solving skills. Beginning in elementary school, students make video recordings of the steps they use to solve math problems. This allows teachers to review their reasoning, not just their answers, and confirm that students are developing conceptual understanding and utilizing the best tools for specific tasks.

Technology extends learning beyond the classroom, increases student engagement, and provides opportunities for individualized learning and differentiation. The MLI represents one of the District's greatest opportunities for innovation.

Images below: Innovation is a process. Tinkering and experimenting challenges students to identify and solve real world problems.



EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN A COMMON CORE WORLD

When current students and graduates of District 36 are asked about the experiences that have had the most impact on them, they often recall the specific activities that form the core of the shared Winnetka Experience, including sailing on the Mayflower, The Pioneer Room, Immigration Day, and Civil War Day. These hands-on studies do more than teach facts and dates in engaging ways; they require students to think deeply, utilize problem-solving skills, draw connections, demonstrate what they have learned, and reflect on their experience. In short, these experiences teach students the competencies they need for real-world success.

While core skills have always been incorporated into these hands-on learning experiences, as the District aligns our local curriculum with the Common Core State Standards, teachers are thoughtfully weaving in new requirements while preserving these experiences. In this way, standards and benchmarks are met in a meaningful, applied way rather than in isolation.



Images on this page: Student experiences include Sailing on the Mayflower, Butterfly Migration, and Immigration Day.

For example, prior to setting sail on the Mayflower, second grade students calculate time and distance traveled. They are asked to estimate how much food will be required for the journey and think about spoilage and other scientific factors. During their travels, children keep journals and reflect upon their experiences. Applying their writing skills to hands-on experiences provides strong motivation for them to write. Project-based activities like these allow students to synthesize information, transfer learning, and understand the relationships between subjects.

Technology has also enhanced these experiences. Second grade students access primary sources including ship manifests prior to selecting the person they will portray during their Mayflower voyage. Examining these documents allows some of our youngest learners to relate to history a personal way as they develop critical and analytical research skills. Fourth grade students use iPads to take virtual tours of Ellis Island and The Tenement museum. They listen to oral histories and examine census data as



Images on this page: Experiential learning includes creating a Wampanoag Village, learning Spanish Flamenco, reenacting Civil War Day, and immigrating through Ellis Island.

they prepare their own Immigration Day stories. Because there are multiple ways to navigate sites like these, students are able to delve deeply into topics of individual interest— statistics, stories, historical artifacts, etc.

Students need to develop many types of proficiencies in Grades K–8. These include fundamental skills (reading, writing, and math), technological skills, and “soft skills” like the ability to do research, synthesize information, work collaboratively, and manage time. Project-based experiences allow students to practice these individual competencies in context and solve complex problems, qualities that will serve them well in high school, college, and beyond.

While core skills have always been incorporated into these hands-on learning experiences, as the District aligns our local curriculum with the Common Core State Standards, teachers are thoughtfully weaving in new requirements while preserving the Winnetka Experience.



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Keeping the community informed and engaged is a high priority. Join our email list by visiting www.winnetka36.org/communication and be on the lookout for the 2015 School Survey in April.



Winnetka students, parents, and community members were some of the more than one million people who participated in International Hour of Code events.



What is a MakerSpace? Just ask these students from The Skokie School who presented at the SIT Conference.