



63 SUCCESS

SUMMER 2021 • VOL. 10.2 • EAST MAINE DISTRICT 63

LOOKING BACK...AND MOVING FORWARD

LOOKING BACK: 2021 IN THE CLASSROOM AND AT HOME

As 2020 drew to a close, Illinois faced rapidly rising COVID-19 cases and local positivity rates that exceeded District 63's own metrics for reverting to remote learning. School districts that had cautiously begun opening their doors once again pivoted to fully remote learning—including D63. But the new year started with a new commitment to opening our buildings, and on January 19, 38 percent of our students (about 1,300) did return to our schools for in-person learning. Each day, K-8th graders headed home before lunch and continued the school day remotely in the afternoon. Preschoolers—now housed in our new Early Learning Center (see page 3)—attended either a morning or afternoon session.



Navigating masks and social distancing presented some challenges, but didn't dampen the lively learning environment!



Whether in our buildings or at home, classmates interacted, made friends, and worked together.

(see page 5) and throughout the District schools held virtual family nights, author visits, and more.

In-person and remote K-5 students learned together as classroom teachers simultaneously worked with children in the room and children on the screen (at Gemini, remote and in-person learners each had their own classes). The learning curve for our educators was steep, but they rose to the challenge with determination and a steadfast commitment to ensuring that every student had the opportunity to succeed.

Whether on-site or at home during the school day, students were also able to participate in a wide range of activities through remote school clubs, from music to piñata making! Art supplies were available for pick up



Nelson School's Piñata Club provided participants with everything they needed at home to build their colorful (and delicious) creations!

TAKING OUR BEST SHOT

From the start, District 63 strongly encouraged staff members to get vaccinated for COVID-19. Late in January, when PreK-12 educators became eligible for the vaccine in Illinois, D63 jumped into action, coordinating multiple vaccine opportunities. Partnering with Maine Township High School District 207, Community Consolidated School District 21 in Wheeling, and Mutual Aid Box Alarm System (MABAS) Division 3 (a partnership of 17 north/northwest suburban fire depart-

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FROM PRESIDENT ALEXANDRA BROOK

SUMMERTIME IS SPECIAL

As we enjoy the summer season, I'm reminded of the symbolism of summer. For many, summer represents freedom, adventure, and self discovery. Given the past 16 months of pandemic restrictions and uncertainties, all those things sound especially appealing this summer.

Summer may be one of the only times many of our students have to themselves. For most of the year, they are under the direction of adults, who structure their days and guide their activities. Our educators are second to none, working tirelessly to ensure our students are on the pathway to success, but summer can offer a different kind of "learning": self-directed and open to new possibilities.

I think that the best thing about a student's "summer growth" is that they're almost unaware of it. It isn't until it's time to return for another school year that they truly experience feeling refreshed—and, perhaps, that they themselves have changed; that things are different.

But students are not the only ones to use summer for self discovery and growth. We know that the educators working with our students are using this summer not only to recharge but to reflect on teaching during a pandemic. I'm a teacher myself, and my own reflections of the past year include:

- Our mental wellbeing comes first.
- Relationships are important.
- Learning differently is still learning.
- Technology should be used in new and meaningful ways.
- If we put our minds to it, we can do anything.
- My outlook for the future is hopeful and optimistic.

On behalf of the Board of Education, I wish you a safe summer filled with adventure and self discovery balanced with rest and relaxation. And, all being well, we look forward to welcoming our students—new and old—back into our buildings on August 16 for a truly amazing year of learning and growing together.

Alexandra Brook

Looking Back/Moving Forward . . . continued

ments), the District was ultimately able to offer convenient vaccine options at no cost to all employees.



A Gemini student receives her first Pfizer vaccine shot at Gemini in May.

The District also shared as much information as possible with families, guiding parents and other adults to clinics operated by Cook County, local pharmacies, and other area health care providers.

Once the vaccine was approved for all those 12 and older in May, D63 quickly partnered with Jewel-Osco to coordinate an on-site clinic for students, parents, and the larger community.



On June 6, our 365 Gemini 8th grade graduates were able to gather safely with family members for a special ceremony outdoors on the Maine East football field.

On May 26—and again on June 16—Gemini Middle School opened its doors to **180 individuals** who received

their first and second doses of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine. Many of the clinic "customers" were indeed middle school students, and parents often joined their children in receiving the shots.

D63 continues to closely follow the progress of vaccine approval for children under 12; if and when a vaccine *is* approved for this age group, we'll coordinate additional on-site clinics with Jewel-Osco as rapidly as possible to make it easy for younger students—and their families—to get their shots, help in to keep all of our schools safer as the year begins.

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Early Learning Center Open House

**Wednesday, September 1
5 – 7 p.m.
10000 Dee Road, Des Plaines**

Join the D63 Board of Education, Administrators, families, and students as we celebrate our 40,000 square foot First Steps Early Learning Center.

Refreshments served; event will comply with all COVID-19 protocols. RSVP to district411@emsd63.org



OUTSTANDING DESIGNS | COMMON AREAS
GEMINI MIDDLE SCHOOL ADDITIONS AND REMODELING
Niles, Illinois





DLA Architects, Ltd.
Client: East Haven School District #3
Area of project entry category: 1A, 100-150
Cost of project entry category: 25, 100,000
Cost/square foot of project entry category: 550
Total area: 12,950 sq. ft.
Total cost: \$7,043,500
Total cost/square foot: 544

Completion:
Four phases to this project. Phase 3 completed February 2020. Phase 4, the athletic fields and track, will be completed August 2020.
Photographer: Alexander Romanovsky/DLA Architects

Gemini Middle School is organized in teams, or "neighborhoods," served by collaborative educational spaces. Clusters of learning studios, learning labs, a teacher collaboration office and conference spaces radiate from learning hubs. The learning hubs are the heart of each team's neighborhood and transform common space into open workspaces where multiple classes of students can gather or students can work independently. Learning hubs encourage student engagement and create more opportunities for team teaching. They offer access to technology and varied seating choices.

The commons/hangout space is an informal area that creates community among students from different neighborhoods. It is perfect for independent, interactive work. Flexible furnishings and writable walls open to the sky make it ideal.

Large groups gather at the learning station. Stripped off the cafeteria, students seek it out. They can have their lunch on the steps or gather to watch a presentation or a movie. The adjacent mezzanine has flexible seating for both small group and interactive work and is the go-to place for after-school club meetings.

NEW D63 SPACES RECOGNIZED FOR EXCELLENCE

Two of D63's newest learning spaces—both designed by DLA Architects, Ltd.—have been recognized by *American School & University Magazine's* Educational Interior Showcase Awards Program. Juried by a panel of experts, the program recognizes top flight educational architectural projects.

Gemini Middle School's recently completed 14,950 square foot "commons" area—featuring a learning stair that students can use for anything from eating lunch to studying and viewing presentations—received an **Outstanding Design Award** in the Common Areas category last year.

More recently, our new **Early Learning Center**, which houses First Steps Preschool, was recognized in the PreK/Early Childhood Education Outstanding Design category, receiving a **Bronze Citation**. As one juror noted, "Each of the shared 'learning hubs' has a clear focus and is thoughtfully designed to

achieve that function. Incorporation of biophilic elements [which connect occupants to the natural environment], including daylighting and murals, creates a dynamic but calm environment."

Looking Back/Moving Forward . . . *continued*

MOVING FORWARD: PLANS FOR THE 2021-2022 SCHOOL YEAR

On July 9, the Centers for Disease Control released updated guidelines for COVID-19 prevention in K-12 schools prioritizing a return to in-person learning—which were quickly adopted by the Illinois Department of Public Health and the Illinois State Board of Education. As of press time, the District is reviewing these guidelines with regard to mask-wearing and other health and safety protocols, but at this time, **plans call for D63 schools to revert to a normal schedule—at full capacity—for the 2021-2022 school year.** All students in grades K-8 will be in our buildings, and preschoolers will attend their in-person half-day schedule.

There may be circumstances under which students are entitled to remain in remote learning—but they are narrowly defined:



The end of the 2020-2021 school year was marked by car parades, special celebrations—and teachers cheering on their students as they headed into summer!

" . . . remote instruction may be made available for students who are not eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine and are under a quarantine order by a local public health department or the Illinois Department of Public Health."

Currently the District has no plans to offer a full-blown remote learning program. COVID-19 vaccines are now widely available for those 12 and older, and it's also likely that vaccines for younger children will indeed be approved this fall. For these reasons, D63 is optimistic that it can safely and fully reopen schools in August. **We continue to encourage all of our D63 parents and eligible students to be vaccinated as soon as possible. It's the best way to help keep you, your family, our schools, and your community safe and healthy.**

As always, the District will be guided by IDPH and the Cook County Department of Public Health.



FROM SUPERINTENDENT DR. SCOTT CLAY

Lessons Learned & Silver Linings

It may take some effort to juxtapose "pandemic" with "silver lining," but as we look back over this unprecedented 16 months, D63 has indeed found a few. In July, we shared some of them with the Board of Education.

"Going virtual" increased parent engagement and streamlined tasks.

Many parents who would otherwise skip travel to and from schools (due to bad weather or childcare needs) were happy to jump into a virtual meeting. As a result, parent participation in many PTOs expanded. Parent-teacher conferences also garnered more involvement—often with both parents present, as both could "attend" from home. Likewise, registering students, interviewing job candidates, and onboarding new employees all became more seamless as these tasks moved online.

It paid to pivot.

We discovered that there was no need to forego school due to emergency weather days. Instead, we quickly and easily pivoted to remote learning—eliminating the need to disrupt learning or extend the end of the school year.

Communicate, communicate, communicate.

D63 has always prioritized parent communication, offering information in multiple formats and often in several languages. The need for multiple formats was highlighted last year as we began streaming Board meetings, used video to present key information to parents about everything from bus protocol to scheduling, and translated more of our messaging. That being said, we also learned that sometimes "less is more"—for example, we may reach more parents via text than email.

Internet access was key to learning.

While the District provided every student with a Chromebook, the ability of our remote students to learn effectively entirely depended on consistent internet access. For this reason we made hotspots available to any family that needed one.

Alexander Graham Bell noted that, "When one door closes, another opens." Truly, a few doors did open during this pandemic and we'll take these lessons learned with us as we welcome our students back next month.

Scott W. Clay

DISTRICT NEWS: #63SUCCESS

ELIZABETH RUSSELL APPOINTED APOLLO ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL •

Former Gemini teacher **Elizabeth Russell** took on a new role in July: **Apollo Assistant Principal**. A long-time member of the D63 team, Russell joined the District in 2012 as a multiage classroom teacher at Melzer after having previously taught at Glenview District 34's Hoffman School. During her time here at our District, she has also served as a literacy specialist, 7th grade ELA teacher, and instructional coach at Gemini. Russell holds an MA in reading education from Concordia University - and a second MA in educational leadership from the American College of Education. She earned her BS in elementary education from Illinois State University.



AN ARTISTIC ENDEAVOR • This spring, *NEA Today*—the National Education Association's magazine—profiled our five elementary school art teachers. The focus was on their creative efforts to connect to students and each other during the pandemic, including distributing art supplies to 2,200 K-5 students. **The story caught the eye of WLS-TV (ABC) and WMAQ-TV (NBC);** both stopped by during Teacher Appreciation Week to profile the group. A special thanks to **Tina Daskalopoulos (pictured), Andrew Hancock, Rick Karmik, Juli Kim, and Monica Larson** for showcasing the commitment all of our educators have to D63 and its students!

HELPING FIND THE ROAD HOME • In April, a group of 8th graders stepped up to help others in need. Teacher Dawn Diliberto (left in photo) reached out to Palatine's **Journeys: The Road Home**, which provides shelter and social services to those who are homeless, and learned they were in desperate need of shampoo, conditioner, body soap, and deodorant. The students put together a presentation, shared it with the school, and were able to gather a sizable donation for the agency. A round of applause to **Jenny A., Safa L., Mia G., and Rudra P.!**



ENVISIONING A GREENER MORTON GROVE • Congratulations to **Melzer student Gemma Hoover!** In June, the future 3rd grader learned she was one of three winners of the Village of Morton Grove's **Kids for a Greener Morton Grove Art Contest**. This summer, you can find Gemma's colorful design printed on reusable shopping bags at the Morton Grove Farmer's Market and other places around town.

HAVE YOU REGISTERED YOUR CHILD FOR SCHOOL? SCHOOL STARTS AUGUST 16

Whether your child is a returning student or you are new to the District,
don't wait to register!

All registration is online; visit www.emsd63.org/registration to get started.

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Expanded Learning 2021- 2022

**Before School • After School • Early
Dismissal Days • School's Out Days •
School Breaks • and more . . .**

Register today!

**Visit www.emsd63.org/expandedlearning to learn
more and sign up.**