



63 SUCCESS

WINTER 2021 • VOL. 10.1 • EAST MAINE DISTRICT 63

A YEAR LIKE NO OTHER *EDUCATION IN THE TIME OF COVID*

As 2021 gets underway, most of us look back on 2020 as a year like no other—one that tested us as never before, and in many cases left us reeling. As the COVID-19 pandemic forced us all to change the way we live, work, and do business—so too have school districts faced extraordinary challenges. All of us have dealt with constant change, learning and stretching; we're sometimes exhausted and sometimes heartened by the strength of those around us. Here's a look at the past few months at District 63.



Most of our students have learned virtually throughout the 2020-2021 school year—even when in-person hybrid learning is offered.



Our Expanded Learning Program provided full-day care (at no cost to families) last fall for remote learners who couldn't stay at home.



After eight months honing their skills, our teaching team members are virtual teaching experts! Gemini Social Studies Teacher Matt Arends even coordinated a virtual talent show last fall.

When Winter Break ended, 1,318 of our students—about 38 percent—returned to our buildings for in-person hybrid learning. The remaining 62 percent continued with remote learning.

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FROM PRESIDENT ALEXANDRA BROOK

To Open or Not to Open

To open or not to open: that is the question. In fact, it *has* been the question since last March, when the Governor closed all public schools in an effort to stem the spread of COVID-19. Virtually overnight (pun intended) we entered the realm of remote learning.

School Boards across the country have been placed in no-win positions of making reopening decisions based on fast-changing data.

As an educator, parent, and Board Member, I know that the best place for our students is in the classroom. However, each time we've debated whether or not to return to in-person instruction, I've asked myself countless questions. Is it safe? How will students and staff adjust to a remote instruction environment? Are we negatively impacting our children? The staff? Are we making the right decision? What are the risks of making the wrong decision?

This topic has resulted in visceral and emotional reactions from parents, teachers, and even Board Members. We know that no matter what decisions we make, some parents will be disappointed or angry. So, how do we know we *are* making the right decision? We don't—entirely. We must make the best choices we can based on the best available information.

But here is what I do know:

- Our district administrators and teachers are dedicated to providing the best possible education for our students, regardless of the delivery method.
- The priority of the Board is always safety first—and D63 is committed to ensuring that our buildings are safe for both students and staff.
- Despite opposing views, Board members always support the final decisions we make together.

As we welcome the New Year, we all hope for better days and a return to “normal.” On behalf of the Board of Education, I wish you a happy and healthy 2021.

Alexandra Brook

Staying Together . . . Continued p. 4



D63 families celebrated Halloween with drive by parades. It was a great chance for students and staff to show off fun costumes and “get together” at a safe distance.



In October, some of our in-person students briefly returned to the classroom. The goal was to stay safe and learn! Buildings closed again in November due to rising COVID-19 positivity rates.



Whether remote or in-person, classmates find a way to connect!

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EARLY LEARNING CENTER OPENS ITS DOORS

When our buildings reopened for in-person hybrid learning in January, D63's new **First Steps Early Learning Center** was ready to welcome preschoolers. The ribbon-cutting ceremony was derailed by COVID-19, but here's a sneak peek of what our students experience!



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Principal Barb Golik outside the ELC front doors—south of Apollo School . . . The colorful Fitness Factory play area helps students improve their gross motor skills. . . One of two playgrounds near the building . . . A playful “tree” greets students and visitors in the lobby . . . The library: perfect for our smallest literacy learners .



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First Steps Programa Preescolar de Educación Dual

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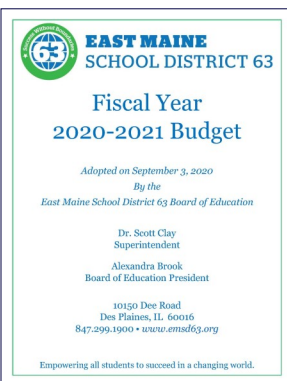
¡REGÍSTRESE HOY!

Staying Together . . . Continued from p. 2



In January, in-person and remote students in grades K-5 began learning together each morning as teachers taught both groups simultaneously. Hybrid students leave before lunch and the whole class learns remotely in the afternoon.

D63 BOARD APPROVES 2020-2021 BUDGET



At its September meeting, D63's Board of Education unanimously approved the District's 2020-2021 budget. **The budget reflects operating revenue of approximately \$45.3 million and operating expenses of approximately \$45.6 million, resulting in an operating deficit of**

approximately \$300,000. This deficit is the result of the impact of COVID-19, and is being absorbed by the District's reserves.

In addition, the Board approved capital projects for the year 2020-2021 in the amount of \$12.4 million. These projects are part of ***Building for Success: The D63 Master Plan*** and are being funded with bonds issued last year.

You can find the full District 63 budget at www.emsd63.org — choose "Business Services" under the "About Us" tab.



FROM SUPERINTENDENT DR. SCOTT CLAY

Finding the Silver Lining

Unprecedented, challenging, heart-breaking, isolating, and so many other words have been used to describe life during this pandemic. Indeed, they all apply to the last 11 months, with many of us having lost loved ones or suffered economic hardships—and of course, parents having their children home all day, everyday, attending school remotely. This was nothing anyone would have chosen, but here we are, soldiering on as we see hope in the beginnings of a vaccine rollout.

Despite it all, we can and do find silver linings. As Superintendent, I have seen many things to celebrate.

I continue to marvel at the resiliency of our students. From our very youngest on up, they have shown their ability to adapt to new situations and take on new challenges. The vast majority of D63 children have found success in their remote classes, including ways to have meaningful interactions with each other, and developing and maintaining friendships.

Although it has surely been a struggle for parents, they too have risen to the challenge. Many have shared that they have a better understanding of how their children learn, have enjoyed seeing how our teachers interact and engage the children in their classes, and have had more frequent and meaningful communication with their children's instructors. For the first time, parents have had a front row seat for their child's school day, and that is certainly a good thing.

Long before I had heard of COVID-19 I knew that our staff members were outstanding educators. They go the extra mile for their students and are constantly looking to improve. The unexpected move to remote learning forced everyone into a completely new way of doing their jobs. Fortunately, like our students, the teachers and other staff members showed their resilience by quickly adapting, learning new skills, and becoming even better at what they do best. I couldn't be more impressed with their efforts nor more proud of how skillfully they have addressed the needs of their students.

Scott W. Clay

DISTRICT NEWS: #63SUCCESS

AWESOME ALUMNI CATEGORY • In August, former Nelson Eagle/Gemini Mustang **John Depa** (Class of 2009) received a **Sports Emmy for Outstanding Esports Coverage!** Depa was part of the production team for the winning entry, "League of Legends World Final" on YouTube.



PRESIDENT FOR A DAY • A round of applause for our own 5th grade Nelson Eagle **Prisha Modi**, who won the **Niles-Maine District Library President for a Day** contest in November! "When I borrow books, music, and movies I learn something new and it's because the library provides all these amazing facilities," she noted. "It helps me learn many different things." On November 3, Library Executive Director **Susan Dove Lempke** presented Prisha with a Key to the Library—and she was also honored at the November Library Board Meeting.

PRINCIPAL PODCAST • Gemini Principal **Lewis Roberts** was featured in the Niles-Maine District Library November episode of *The Library Scoop* podcast, discussing everything from learning in the time of COVID to how our middle school supports all of its students' pathway to success. You can still access the interview at <https://nileslibrary.org/podcast>—select Episode #17.



WINTER CARD WINNER • More than 25 K-7th grade students submitted artwork for the District's fifth annual Winter Card Design Contest. D63 staff and leaders cast "blind" votes (without knowing the student or the school) for their favorites in each grade. Congratulations to Mark Twain 5th grader **Maryam Jawed**, who won top honors! Maryam's piece featuring reindeer silhouetted against a shimmering sunset was featured on D63's 2020 winter card; and she and our Best in Grade winners were honored (virtually) at the December 3 Board of Education meeting.

WE CARE CAMPAIGN MAKES A DIFFERENCE • D63's We Care Campaign wrapped up on December 18 and was a success by every measure! Thanks to the many generous donations from D63 staff and families, we were able to put together **80 care packages to go to D63 families most in need.** Food donations to the **Maine Township Food Pantry** filled four shopping carts, and our Virtual Goods Drive collected more than **1,230 items for Niles Family Services!**



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