



63 SUCCESS

SUMMER 2020 • VOL. 9.2 • EAST MAINE DISTRICT 63

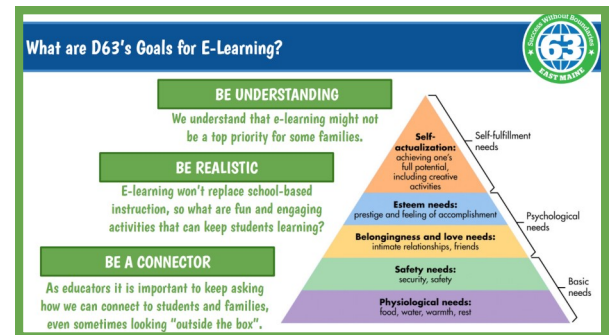
STAYING TOGETHER . . . WHILE WE'RE APART

As students headed home on Friday, March 13, no one realized it would be the last day our school doors would open for the 2019-2020 year. Navigating the uncharted territory of the Coronavirus pandemic, District 63 — like every Illinois school district— was faced with a unique challenge: how to educate more than 3,400 students . . . from a distance.

A Seismic Shift

Almost overnight, hundreds of educators had to begin instructing thousands of students—all from home. In the face of rapidly changing circumstances, D63 defined its e-learning goals: **be understanding, be realistic, and be a connector.** Despite the empty buildings, our commitment to educating and supporting our students remained.

Anticipating school closure, staff began building an e-learning plan early in March. But as the weeks passed, the District had to learn as it went, adjusting when experience—or new state directives— suggested a change of course.



Success . . . Without Boundaries



Never had our tagline seemed more apt. **By Monday, March 16, teaching and support staff had pivoted to e-learning,** pulling out all the stops to provide meaningful learning experiences. Guided by the Illinois State Board of Education, staff developed curriculum, set expectations, defined what types of learning and teaching would work best remotely, and created an online attendance system—all accompanied by in-depth professional development and resources for the teaching team.

Choice and novelty were the guiding principles. Many teachers used Choice Boards to provide a range of “must do” and “can do” options for their students. A middle schooler might **design an experiment to demonstrate one of Newton's three laws of motion** and post it to Google classroom, **create a movie trailer based on a literary genre**, and **complete math problems**—followed by a quiz—online. Our kindergarteners might choose to **survey family members about a favorite summer activity** (and write about it), **watch a video science experiment**, or **count and categorize household toys**. Teachers wove together live (virtual) and pre-recorded instruction, and were available via email throughout each school day.

But as important as academics were the myriad ways educators went above and beyond to ensure that students stayed engaged and connected.



Continued on page 2



FROM PRESIDENT ALEXANDRA BROOK

FINDING THE RIGHT WORDS

There are times when it is difficult to find the right words. Over the past few months we've all been tested in ways we never dreamed possible—and since late May, the challenges we face have deepened as George Floyd's brutal death has broken our hearts. Our students and families—our communities and country—are grieving.

This is not the first time we have all witnessed the systemic racism that is a part of this country's history, and the violence and inequity it creates and perpetuates.

As a District that has long celebrated diversity, recognizing that it provides a rich learning environment for our students that enhances their education, we have experienced, all too often, the ugly toll racism can take.

We acknowledge the pain many of our families and students are experiencing—especially our families and students of color—and we acknowledge the struggles they face.

And we know: it is not enough to simply say racism is wrong. Racism must be addressed and stopped.

As leaders of District 63, we reaffirm the commitment we have always had to acknowledging and lifting up diversity, identifying and dismantling racism, and emphasizing equity.

But as educators, we also commit ourselves anew to doing better, redoubling our efforts to teach children—and ourselves—to value difference. First and foremost, we must listen to the concerns of our black families, and all D63 families who struggle under the burden of racism, to better understand and address their unique challenges.

We share your sense of anger, sadness, and frustration at this time. And it should go without saying, but to be clear: **no form of racism brought to our attention will ever be tolerated within the walls of any D63 school.**

Alexandra Brook

Staying Together . . . *continued*

Teachers kept school **“Spirit Days”** alive from home, asking students to show up to virtual meetings in school t-shirts or funny hats—and even bring pets into the picture!

Creativity blossomed, from **personal letters mailed to each student** to one dual language teacher who persuaded Argentinian actor/singer **Juan Pablo Di Pace** to create a video of himself reading ***Where the Wild Things Are—in Spanish***. One physical education team coordinated a “virtual Field Day,” and 120 hand-crafted sewing kits were delivered straight to students' doors so that they could finish a Family & Consumer Sciences project.

As the year wound down, schools held car parades and special



“contactless” celebrations (including a virtual Gemini graduation) to come together and say goodbye—if only from six feet away.

Supporting Success

Supporting our families goes far beyond the classroom. As e-learning took off, D63 worked quickly to build the “scaffolding” that would ensure success.



E-learning can't happen without access to technology. While 1,147 Chromebooks were already in

the hands of Gemini students, the Technology Department **distributed an additional 1,193 Chromebooks** to PreK-5th grade students, **provided 69 hotspots** to families without internet access, and **offered technical support** throughout the spring.

Continued on page 4

NEW LEADERSHIP AT D63

At its meeting on June 4, the D63 Board of Education approved the appointment of three new leaders. Not all of them are new to the District, but each stepped into a new role here on July 1. Congratulations to all - and welcome to Mr. Henning!



Jennifer Pacheco, *Director of Special Services*. Principal of Melzer School since 2016, Pacheco worked at D63 from 2006-2014—first as a Special Education Resource Teacher at Apollo, and then as a District Special Education Facilitator—before spending two years as Associate Principal at Maywood/Melrose Park/Broadview District 89's Stevenson Middle School. Pacheco holds a B.S.Ed. in special education from Northern Illinois University, an MA in educational technology and instructional design from DeVry University, and an MA in educational leadership from the University of Phoenix.



Angela Maki, *Principal, Melzer Elementary School*. Maki joined District 63 as Apollo's Assistant Principal in 2017. She came to D63 from Wauconda Community Unit School District 118, where she served as Assistant Principal for Robert Crown Elementary for five years. Previous experience includes teaching 3rd grade in Wauconda Community School District 118. Maki holds a BA in elementary education from Wisconsin's Saint Norbert College and an MA in school leadership from Concordia University.



Stephan Henning, *Assistant Principal, Apollo Elementary School*. Formerly a 7th Grade Social Studies Teacher at Troy School District's Boulan Park Middle School in Michigan, Henning has spent much of his life as an educator and sports coach. In addition to also teaching 4th grade for the Troy District, he taught at both the elementary and middle school levels in Michigan and Beloit, Wisconsin. A graduate of Michigan's Rochester College with a BA in elementary education, he also holds an MA in educational technology and an Administrative Certification from Marygrove College in Detroit.

UPDATE: FIRST STEPS PRESCHOOL CONSTRUCTION

Our school buildings may have been closed this spring, but work on our new **First Steps Preschool early learning center** continued.

By June, the building—located just south of Apollo School on Dee Road in Des Plaines—was taking shape, and work will continue throughout the summer. Plans call for the new center to be substantially completed early in November.

Although no final decisions have been made regarding the start of the 2020-2021 school year, any onsite learning for preschoolers would begin in Apollo, Melzer, and Washington Elementary Schools (as it has traditionally done in the past) - with **students transitioning to the new center in November, after Thanksgiving break** (presuming the District is providing face-to-face learning.)



Staying Together . . . *continued*

Our website—www.emsd63.org—hosted a wealth of resources, from e-learning information and instructions to special video channels featuring principal announcements and staff read-alouds. Virtual **yoga** and **Self-Care Saturdays**—guided meditation and reflection sessions in English and Spanish—helped parents (and staff) gain some much-needed tranquility during these difficult times.

Many D63 students receive free and reduced cost meals, and to ensure this critical service continued, the

District quickly coordinated a twice-weekly carline pick up, providing meals for any child under 18—followed in April by meal delivery for families who lacked transport. **By June 10, the last day of school, D63 had distributed 89,684 meals.** This service continues through the summer.



In This Together



Even with buildings empty and families and staff scattered, D63 worked to make a difference. Surplus hand sanitizer and wipes were donated to Advocate Lutheran Hospital. Food drives collected more than 1,525 food items (real and “virtual” through donations) and

\$7,000 for area food pantries, and PTOs spearheaded efforts to thank essential workers with everything from card-writing campaigns to lunch deliveries. A virtual “May Madness” Trick Shot Tournament stood in for the annual Charity Basketball Game, raising more than \$2,900 for Lurie Children’s Hospital.

Finding a Way Forward

As noted in Dr. Clay’s letter, planning for the 2020-2021 school year is still underway. But despite the recent rocky terrain, we have found so many silver linings as we’ve watched the D63 community come together with creativity, persistence, and compassion.



FROM SUPERINTENDENT DR. SCOTT CLAY

Planning for the 2020-2021 School Year

As we wrap up this unique and challenging school year, we are grateful to all of our D63 families and our incredible staff. Together, we’ve ensured that our students continued to learn and feel supported. We’re eager to get back to “normal,” with students and teachers filling our classrooms.

We are also keenly aware that our families wonder what the future holds for the coming school year. **On June 23, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) released guidance for Districts regarding opening schools for the 2020-2021 year.**

This 60-page document (available at www.isbe.net) has been much anticipated and will go a long way toward answering critical questions about what the school year will look like in terms of in-person learning, scheduling, transportation, wearing masks, social distancing, and other measures intended to keep everyone safe and healthy, while also re-engaging students in the learning process.

Right now, we don’t have all the answers to those questions as this document was released to school districts at the same time it was released to the public.

Therefore, we continue to ask for your patience as our District Steering Committee—comprising administrators, Board members, teachers, and parents—thoroughly reviews this detailed guidance and builds a transition plan that takes ISBE’s suggestions into account.

I’m confident that District 63 can create a plan that prioritizes the health and safety of our students while maintaining a dynamic learning environment. **We anticipate releasing our own transition plan sometime this month.**

Thank you again for your patience, understanding, and flexibility as our entire District navigates a situation together that none of us could have imagined. Feel free to submit any questions you have to district411@emsd63.org and check our **FAQ page at www.emsd63.org.** Enjoy your summer—and we’ll continue to share updates as more information becomes available.

Scott W. Clay

DISTRICT NEWS: #63SUCCESS

GEMINI WELCOMES THE COMMUNITY • On March 10—before the schools closed and the lockdown began—**Gemini opened its doors to the community on a beautiful spring evening.** Students, families, staff, neighbors, and community leaders gathered to explore the new and improved space—from the Learning Stairs to the new performance area—learn more about the school on tours led by Gemini students, and even enjoy special donuts featuring the school logo!



ILLINOIS EPA HONORS GEMINI STUDENTS • Although they weren't able to make it to Springfield for the ceremony this spring, we applaud our **six Gemini students** who took home awards in the **2020 Illinois Environmental Protection Agency Poster, Poetry, and Prose Contest!** Congratulations to Top Award winners **Noura Kazzo, Wendy Patricia, and Lilia Ransford**; Honorable Mention winners **Sky Hana and Shaan Kannampallil**; and **Harishree Mehta**, who received Special Recognition.

TWAIN'S SHEILA WHEATLEY RECOGNIZED • Mark Twain Social Worker **Sheila Wheatley** (second from left) received more than one vote of confidence this year for the positive difference she makes in the lives of hundreds of students. In addition to receiving a **Community Leader Award from nearby Embark Senior Living** for creating a range of programs that bring students and Embark residents together, Wheatley was named one of **three nominees for the Niles Chamber of Commerce Dedication to Youth Excellence Award**. We're cheering her on and hoping she takes home top honors at the October Night of Roses banquet!



SURBER AWARD WINNERS: GOING ABOVE & BEYOND •

Named for the founding director of the Total Learning Community Program (now Expanded Learning), our Pam Surber Awards of Excellence are presented annually to two D63 staff members who have gone above and beyond on an ongoing basis, consistently providing excellent, top-notch service to our District, schools, and students. Congratulations to our 2020 Award recipients **Gina Dell'Aringa**, Washington Instructional Coach; and **Richard Kunz**, Gemini Head Custodian.

HAVE YOU REGISTERED YOUR CHILD FOR SCHOOL?

SCHOOL START DATES:

AUGUST 17 FOR GRADES K-8 • AUGUST 18 FOR PRESCHOOL

Whether your child is entering kindergarten, a returning preschooler or 1st-8th grader, or new to D63, don't wait to register!

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

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East Maine School District 63
Educational Service Center
10150 Dee Road
Des Plaines, Illinois 60016

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DR. SCOTT CLAY
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CONTACT US
EAST MAINE SCHOOL
DISTRICT 63
847.299.1900
WWW.EMSD63.ORG



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Expanded Learning 2020- 2021

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

Register today!

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learn more and sign up.**