



# 63 SUCCESS

WINTER 2020 • VOL. 9.1 • EAST MAINE DISTRICT 63

## BUILDING FOR SUCCESS *LEARNING FOR THE 21ST CENTURY*

**C**ontinuous improvement: it's the lynchpin of effective teaching and learning. Changing standards and student needs—and an ever-evolving understanding of how children learn best—means that over time instruction changes as well. **At D63, it all begins with inquiry-based learning**, a student-driven teaching style that encourages educators to step back as students, in effect, “learn how to learn.” But how does this play out in the classroom every day?

### Expanding Kindergarten

This year **all five D63 elementary schools welcomed kindergarteners for a full day**. Previously, the short a.m. and p.m. sessions limited instruction, which focused exclusively on reading, writing, and math. Now, simply put, there's more time to delve into all core subjects—including science and social studies. Through “purposeful play,” students begin to explore, ask questions, and learn by doing. From “choice reading” in the morning to art, music, and other special classes in the afternoon, wondering, discovering, and feeling—leading to inquiry and integration—are core principles.



## GEMINI COMMUNITY OPEN HOUSE

**TUESDAY, MARCH 3  
6:30 - 8 P.M.**

**8955 GREENWOOD AVENUE, NILES**

**JOIN US AS WE CELEBRATE THE  
COMPLETION OF MORE THAN  
104,900 SQUARE FEET OF NEW  
AND REMODELED STATE-OF-  
THE-ART LEARNING SPACE.**

**RSVP TO DISTRICT411@EMSD63.ORG**

**OPEN TO THE PUBLIC • ALL ARE WELCOME!  
REFRESHMENTS SERVED.**



### Literacy Learning

Strong literacy skills are the foundation for all learning. To ensure that every student has a solid base, the District adopted a new core literacy resource this year: **Units of Study in Reading**. Developed by Columbia University's Teachers College, the curriculum focuses on short mini-lessons coupled with students reading “just right” books for a prolonged period of time. Teachers support individual students through small group instruction and one-to-one conferencing. An added bonus: new classroom libraries enhance easy access to books and encourage deep engagement in reading.

### Mastering Math

Our D63 elementary schools have used **Eureka Math** as a core resource for several years, but Gemini's transition to a middle school model serving 6th-8th graders—with a 30 percent increase in math instructional time—included a switch to **Open-Up Resources™**. One reason for the change: Maine East is transitioning from a traditional math sequence (algebra one year, geometry the next) to an *integrated* math sequence that

*Continued on page 2*

**EMPOWERING ALL STUDENTS TO SUCCEED IN A CHANGING WORLD**



## FROM PRESIDENT ALEXANDRA BROOK

### WHY ME? WHY *NOT* ME?

Recently, I was asked why I chose to run for a seat on the Board of Education. I immediately began stating my unwavering support of public education, volunteering, and so on. My interlocutor acknowledged my desire to volunteer, but then challenged me by asking why I specifically chose to *serve on the Board*—as opposed to doing some other sort of volunteer work.

I grew up in a family of immigrants who were deeply involved in community service. Both sets of grandparents, as well as my parents, served on the boards of various nonprofit organizations; they believed strongly in giving back.

Once my children started school, I knew that it was important to become involved. Even though I worked full time outside the home, I wanted to help in some way, no matter how small. Over time, my volunteer role increased. It gave me a sense of fulfillment and my kids were happy to see me (usually) hanging out at their school.

Then, late in 2012, I learned that a seat on the D63 Board would open in the 2013 election. I had attended Board meetings in the past, but didn't think being a Board member was for me. I didn't think I had the right skills, or the time necessary to dedicate to this important role.

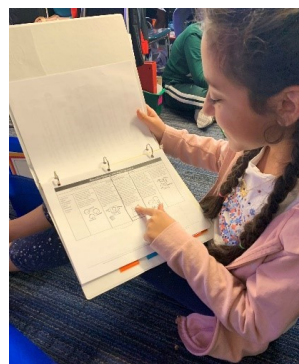
Slowly that perception changed. After speaking with a couple of Board members, I began to think that maybe serving on the Board *was* for me—and I've been doing so since the spring of 2013. I didn't run for office because I thought I alone could provide solutions to all unresolved issues, nor did I run due to ego. I ran because, well, why *not* me?

Too often, our perceptions and fears dissuade us from involving ourselves in activities outside our comfort zone. I'm here to tell you: don't let your fears prevent you from trying something new. You can be the next PTO member, fundraising chairperson, or Board of Education member. It can be YOU!

On behalf of the Board of Education, I wish you a happy, healthy and prosperous New Year!

*Alexandra Brook*

## Building for Success . . . *continued*



teaches many types of math simultaneously. The integrated Open-Up ensures that our students are ready to master high school math.

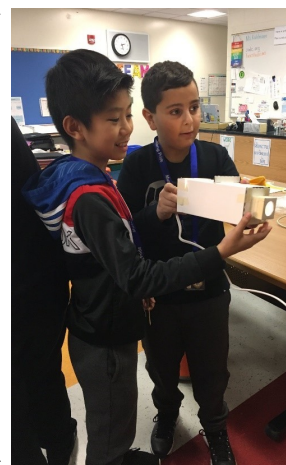
### Science and STEAM

D63 has selected science resources that best align with national **Next Generation Science Standards** adopted here in Illinois. Our K-5 students begin their STEAM learning with **STEMscopes™**, while Gemini uses **IQWST® (Investigating and Questioning our World With Science and Technology)**, a research-based curriculum supported by the National Science Foundation. Within an inquiry-based framework, students explore chemistry, as well as life, earth, and physical science by the time they wrap up 8th grade.

STEAM learning is a priority, and **all Gemini students attend STEAM classes every other day**. Sixth graders jump into **DIVE-in Engineering**, which focuses on hands-on projects (the students here are building a projector). Our 7th and 8th graders are ready for **FUSE**, which is student led with teacher guidance. Learners choose their own projects—from building their dream home to training a robot—and “level up” to more complex challenges as they master skills.

### Social Studies: Taking Action

When possible, D63 seeks an existing curriculum that aligns well with Illinois state educational standards. But no existing social studies curriculum met state standards satisfactorily; and so, over a two-year period, D63 educational leaders and teachers **developed a unique social studies curriculum**.



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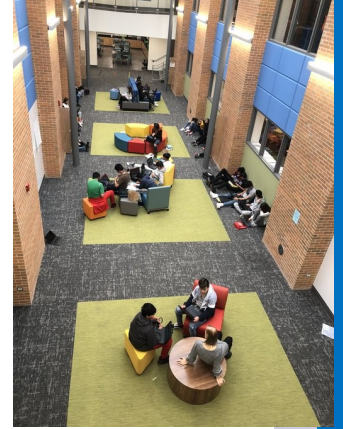


## CONSTRUCTION UPDATE

**GEMINI MIDDLE SCHOOL** • When it opened its doors to more than 1,100 6th-8th grade students in August, Gemini was transformed. More than 104,000 square feet of new and remodeled space included science classrooms custom designed for STEAM learning, open spaces for collaborative learning, a cafeteria expansion featuring a “learning stairway,” and more — offering myriad new ways for students to achieve success without boundaries.

Gemini’s prominent new mustang mascot entrance now welcomes students and visitors to the school! During the fall, construction continued on the

administration area and a new performance space/gym. Both will be complete early in 2020. Mark your calendar for our **Open House on March 3** (see page1)!



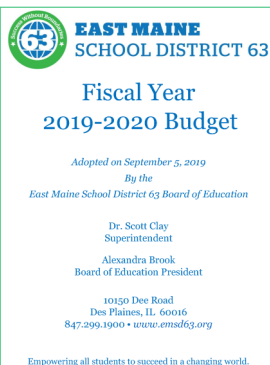
**FIRST STEPS PRESCHOOL** • Currently, you can find our D63 preschoolers at Apollo, Melzer, and Washington Elementary Schools. But construction is now underway on a new, purpose-built early learning center that will bring all of our 250 youngest students together under one roof. Located at Dee and Harrison—just south of Apollo School—the new 40,000 square-foot facility (pictured in the schematic rendering here) will feature STEAM, nutrition, and active play learning hubs as

well as two playgrounds; a library/performance space; and geothermal heating and cooling.

The new First Steps facility is scheduled to open for the 2020-2021 school year. But learning can happen anywhere, and in the meantime, our current Apollo preschoolers are getting a first-hand look at the construction process as they watch their new “home” taking shape in real time!



## D63 BOARD APPROVES 2019-2020 BUDGET



At its September meeting, D63’s Board of Education unanimously approved a balanced budget for the District’s 2019-2020 school year. **The budget reflects operating revenue of approximately \$46.1 million and operating expenses of approximately \$45.7 million**, resulting in an operating surplus of approximately \$400,000.

In addition, the Board approved capital projects for the year 2019-2020 in the amount of \$39.2 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](http://www.emsd63.org) — choose “Business Services” under the “About Us” tab.

## Building for Success . . . *continued*

Staying true to the tenants of inquiry-based learning, the goal is to help students *take informed action*. Once they understand the Constitution, for example, we ask “What comes next? How do we become engaged citizens?”

### Gemini Electives: Ample Options

This year, Gemini students can opt for a wide range of electives. Each quarter, 6th graders explore a new class on their “**elective wheel**”: health, exploratory languages, art, and creative communications.

Older students select from video production, exploratory languages, creative communications, sign language, family & consumer sciences (FAC), or creative writing. FAC is particularly popular, with 12 sections this school year. Among other things, our students are baking everything from pizza to pancakes!



But whether they're pouring pancake batter, building robots, losing themselves in a great book, or learning how a bill becomes a law, our students benefit from the academic rigor of inquiry-based learning: asking questions, researching answers, evaluating what they've learned, and sharing that knowledge.



**SPRING BREAK**  
MAR 23-27  
with daily care from 7:30 a.m. until 6 p.m.  
**CAMP**

Register at  
[www.emsd63.org/expandedlearning](http://www.emsd63.org/expandedlearning)



## FROM SUPERINTENDENT DR. SCOTT CLAY

### The Family Resource Center: Empowering Students and their Families

This year we opened our **New Family Resource Center** — greatly enhancing our ability to meet the needs of our students and their families. Located at 9000 Capitol Drive (the former Stevenson School), The FRC houses three important services: **classes and programs for D63 parents and students**, our **Expanded Learning Program**, and a **professional development center**.

Strong families support strong learners, and **from yoga in Spanish to financial literacy seminars, parenting workshops, and English language classes, the FRC offers parents a wide range of educational opportunities**—almost always for free. Student offerings have included ballet and a youth mentoring group. Classes are driven by parent and student need and, over time, will change as those needs change. Through these classes our families gain knowledge and skills, develop connections with other families, and — for those new to the area — a better understanding of their adopted community and in some cases their adopted country.

The Center also serves as a great new “base” for our long-running **Expanded Learning Program**, which provides D63 families with a safe place for their children to learn and grow before school, after school, or during the summer, winter, and spring breaks. From homework help and field trips to arts, STEAM, and sports activities, participants receive care in an enriching environment.

As noted on page 1, D63 focuses on continuous improvement. The FRC enables us to provide **high-quality professional development in a purpose-built, central space for our educators**, ensuring that we can better meet the learning needs of our students—and avoid the additional cost of sending them to venues outside of our school district.

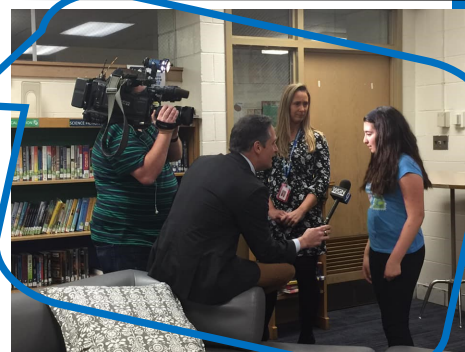
Each of these services enriches our community by better educating our families, increasing connections to the area, and developing a more highly informed citizenry. And we hope all of our D63 families will explore our Winter FRC options at [www.emsd63.org/FRC](http://www.emsd63.org/FRC).

*Scott W. Clay*



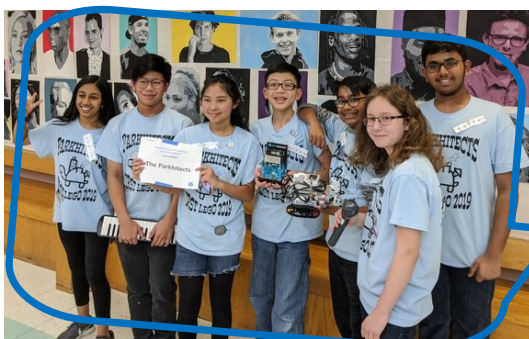
## DISTRICT NEWS: #63SUCCESS

**LIGHTENING FAST LIFE SAVING** • A routine September afternoon at Washington School took a frightening turn when 5th grader Bella began choking on a bottle cap. Quick action taken by teacher **Melissa Sagat** and school nurse **Terri Bauer** saved her life. WGN News and ABC7/WLS News covered the story, which aired on October 22. We're incredibly proud of our entire Washington team for seamlessly handling a scary situation - and very happy that Bella is back in school and just fine!



**BATTLE OF THE BOOKS CHAMPS** • A round of applause for our **Nelson Eagles Battle of the Books Team**, reigning champions of the Niles-Maine District Library's 40th Annual competition. Six teams—including teams from Mark Twain, Melzer, and Washington — “battled” from October through December, answering questions gleaned from 60 books chosen by the library. In the end, our Eagles won the day with a whopping 658 points!

**WINTER CARD CONTEST** • More than 50 K-8th grade students submitted artwork for the District's fourth 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. Our top winner was Gemini 8th grader **Maryann Zamora**. Maryann's piece featuring snowy pines and a friendly snowman was featured on D63's 2019 winter card and she was honored — with our Best In Grade winners — at the December 5 Board of Education meeting.



**PARKHITECTS PREVAIL** • On December 14, months of hard work paid off as Gemini's four Robotics Teams—Robocoders, Parkhitects, Big Brain Builders, and Elite Engineers—made their mark at the **FIRSTLEGO League Qualifying Robotics Tournament**. **Parkhitects advanced to the state competition in January!** Congratulations to team members (L-R): Shalini P. (7th), Vincent S. (8th), Angela L. (7th), Matthew N. (8th), Aadi D. (8th), Ilhana S. (8th), and Baseer S. (8th).

### APOLLO'S JOANA SANCHEZ: A SYMETRA HERO IN THE CLASSROOM

• Second grade dual language teacher **Joana Sanchez** is one of 16 teachers across the Chicagoland area who received a 2019-2020 Symetra Hero in the Classroom Award. This community program - presented locally by Arthur J. Gallagher in partnership with Symetra and the Chicago Bears - recognizes Chicago-area teachers for outstanding leadership and instructional skills during each Bears season. Apollo received a \$2,000 grant, but Sanchez won the real prize: a chance to attend a Bears game as a VIP — including a visit right down on Soldier Field!



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

## SCHOOL ROUND UP FALL 2019

*D63's elementary school boundaries shifted this year, altering the geographic make up of some of our schools. Here's a run-down of where each school's students call home.*

**Apollo** (*Des Plaines*) More than 510 K-5 students—about 90 percent of whom live in unincorporated Des Plaines—attend our largest elementary school. A much smaller group (about 8.5 percent) are Niles residents.

**First Steps** (*Apollo, Melzer, Washington*) Our 255 preschoolers—who live in all five municipalities and unincorporated areas we serve—are spending one last year in our elementary schools before moving to the new early learning center.

**Gemini** (*Niles*) For the first time, Gemini opened its doors as a middle school to 1,100 6th-8th graders. About 45 percent call Des Plaines home; another 32 percent are Niles natives. The balance live in Glenview, Morton Grove, and Park Ridge.

**Mark Twain** (*Niles*) Twain welcomed more than 405 K-5 students this year, and most (87 percent) are residents of unincorporated Des Plaines. The remaining 13 percent live in Park Ridge and Niles.

**Melzer** (*Morton Grove*) About 72 percent of Melzer's 365 K-5 students are Morton Grove residents—but more than 18 percent live in Niles, with much smaller groups from unincorporated Des Plaines and Glenview.

**Nelson** (*Niles*). Most of Nelson's 506 K-5 students (90 percent) call Niles home—but about 6.5 percent live in Morton Grove, with a smattering residing in other areas the District serves.

**Washington** (*Glenview*) Our 330 K-5 Wildcats are fairly evenly balanced. Approximately 40 percent live in Glenview, but 30 percent are Niles residents. About 27 percent reside in unincorporated Des Plaines.