



63 SUCCESS

JULY 2019 • VOL. 8.2 • EAST MAINE DISTRICT 63

BUILDING FOR SUCCESS *D63 MASTER PLAN UPDATE*



Gemini's new entrance will highlight the school's Mustang mascot.

In December 2016, East Maine School District 63 kicked off **Building for Success**, a multi-year Master Plan to better serve its families by enhancing learning spaces, expanding educational opportunities, and enriching its educational program. As the 2019-2020 school year approaches, our community will see exciting changes across the District. Here's an overview of what's on the horizon:

Countdown to Middle School

As our 2019 graduates crossed the stage in May for their diplomas, **Gemini officially transitioned from junior high to middle school**. This August, the school will welcome more than 1,000 6th-8th graders. Students will enter a school transformed: **more than 104,900 square feet of new and remodeled space featuring an instrumental music suite, remodeled classrooms, an expanded cafeteria and library, an upgraded fitness center, dedicated performance space, and more.**

All of this space is purpose-built to serve the needs of preteens, supporting the middle school model. Whereas a **junior high** is a kind of "pre-high school," a **middle school** strategically and deliberately focuses on preteens and their unique social, emotional, academic, and physical needs. For example, the focus is on **teams**, not **departments** (more common at high schools). New elective options will include family and consumer sciences, broadcasting, exploratory language, and introduction to sign language.

A Full Day of Kindergarten

As our 6th graders shift to Gemini, **all five D63 elementary schools will welcome kindergarteners for a full day of learning**. Long desired by our families, this expanded program will enable our young students to progress much faster in reading, math, and other subjects. Simply put: there's more time to delve into core subjects, build stronger relationships with educators and other students, and benefit from an expanded curriculum that focuses on the whole child.



The new student commons - now under construction - will incorporate comfortable seating, white boards for working on projects, and lots of natural light.

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FROM PRESIDENT ALEXANDRA BROOK

BREAKING NEW GROUND

Our East Maine District 63 logo has the words “Success Without Boundaries” embedded into it. We believe in these words so strongly that we were recently recognized for **pioneering work with students and families who are homeless.**

Under state law, students who are homeless may remain in their current school even if they move outside the district. Public school districts receive state funds to cover transportation costs, which can be high. But a 2017 amendment to the Illinois Education for Homeless Children Act allows districts to redirect *transportation dollars* toward covering *housing costs*, keeping students and families within the district.

District 63 was the first in Illinois to take advantage of this change. Last year, partnering with Niles Family Services and Northwest Compass, Inc., our dedicated school social work staff helped two homeless families find housing here in D63: better for the student, and a better use of state dollars.

Many children across the country face poverty, bullying, and unstable family situations. Often, school is the only stable and safe haven they know. It is especially difficult for those students, who through no fault of their own, find themselves homeless.

District leadership recognizes that keeping students in their school community is not only the right thing to do, but will have a positive impact on their social-emotional and academic learning, allowing them to maintain friendships, activities, and an overall sense of belonging. This work truly embodies D63’s commitment to providing all students with opportunities they need to succeed and thrive.

Alexandra Brook



D63 was recognized at the January Board meeting by the North Cook Intermediate Service Center and Regional Office of Education for its trail-blazing work with homeless families.

Building for Success . . . *continued*

Rebalancing the District

These District-wide changes meant that our elementary schools would be underutilized. In order to operate in a fiscally responsible manner, D63 undertook an in-depth study into options for redrawing



Future Mark Twain Cougars show off their new spirit wear during a May field trip to the school. All students who are being redistricted in August had a chance to visit their new D63 “homes” in May.

elementary school attendance boundaries. After gathering input from families, **the Board made the decision to close Stevenson School and redistrict our families into the five remaining elementary schools.**

Throughout the 2018-2019 school year, much work revolved around notifying impacted families, addressing any concerns, and, finally, helping them feel welcome in their new schools. In May, more than 500 students who will shift to a new school this August took a special field trip to their new D63 “home” —and came back with spirit wear featuring the new school’s logo.

Expanding Family Resources

When one door closes, another opens: shutting Stevenson School provided new opportunities, and the building has been re-imagined as a **Family Resource Center.** Remodeled and updated, it’s the perfect setting for many of our Expanded Learning Programs — particularly programming held over winter, spring, and summer breaks. And this dedicated space will also enable the District to **expand its offerings for families, from ELL events and Special Education workshops to a broad range of parent education programs.**

In addition, the space will be used for the extensive professional development D63 provides to ensure the latest tools and techniques are used in the classroom.

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NEW LEADERSHIP AT THE DISTRICT



ANGELICA SCHAB, DIRECTOR OF FAMILY SERVICES. In addition to leading the District's Expanded Learning Program, Schab will manage the new Family Resource Center, housed in the former Stevenson School.

Schab previously served as Camp and SmartLAB Director for Northbrook's North Suburban YMCA, but she's no stranger to D63. Before joining the Y in 2017, Schab had been a part of the District 63 family since 2015, originally coming on board as a Teaching Assistant. She has also held positions with the Jewish Council for Youth Services' Camp Henry Horner and the Boys & Girls Clubs. Schab earned a B.A. in Spanish from Northeastern Illinois University and plans to complete her M.A. in nonprofit administration at North Park University in 2020.



HOWARD SUSSMAN, PRINCIPAL OF MARK TWAIN SCHOOL. Formerly Principal of Stevenson School, Sussman was named to the top slot at Mark Twain Elementary School as the District redrew its elementary school boundary lines and closed Stevenson, which will become the Family Resource Center.

Sussman began his career as a social studies teacher at District 36's Harrison School in Wonder Lake, subsequently serving as Assistant Principal for three schools and as Principal at Oak Crest Elementary in Beach Park before joining District 63 in 2007. He holds a B.S. in finance from Indiana University, where he also received his teacher certification. Sussman earned his M.Ed. in educational leadership from National-Louis University.



ELLIAN EYDIS, ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL OF MARK TWAIN SCHOOL. Previously an Academic Achievement Coach at Stevenson, Eydis joins Principal Sussman at Twain next year - expanding the school's leadership team as its student population grows from 300 to more than 425.

Eydis joined D63 in 1994. After teaching 2nd, 4th, and 5th grade at Apollo, she shifted first into a Professional Development Coach position in 2009 and then, in 2011, to her AAC role, working at Melzer and Nelson before moving to Stevenson. Eydis holds a B.S. in education from the University of Kansas, as well as a dual masters degree in educational leadership and curriculum and instruction from the American College of Education in Indiana.

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**2019-2020 NEW
STUDENT
REGISTRATION
GRADES 1-8**

**Monday, August 12
12:30 - 7:30 p.m.**

**Apollo School
10100 Dee Road, Des Plaines**

Visit www.emsd63.org/registration for details

**Have a new kindergarten student? Stop by your
child's school beginning August 8 to register.**

Building for Success . . . *continued*

First Steps: A Home of its Own



The new First Steps Preschool will be located at Dee and Harrison, just south of Apollo.

D63's First Steps Preschool has operated out of its elementary schools for many years. But with enrollment topping 300, this program needs a place to call home.

In July, the District will break ground on a new First Steps Preschool early learning center.

Located just south of Apollo School in

unincorporated Des Plaines, the 40,000 square-foot facility will feature a sensory playground, learning studios, and a STEM hub. The center will open its doors for the 2020-2021 school year.

Paying the Bills

From the start, the goal was to implement Building for Success using existing tax

revenue streams and bonds (a standard method of paying for facilities D63 has used for many years). And we're pleased to report we're on track: the Master Plan does not require additional property tax revenues—and will ensure that the District is an asset to Maine Township for decades to come.



Schematic of the preschool's front entrance.



FROM SUPERINTENDENT DR. SCOTT CLAY

BUILDING THE RIGHT TEACHING TEAM

An organization is only as good as its people, and D63 is no exception. Through careful hiring and ongoing professional development, we have amassed a staff of highly trained, innovative educators with a focus on student growth and social-emotional development. Ideal D63 team members need to be:

Child-focused. It may seem obvious but it's an attribute we never take for granted. A child-centered educator seeks to meet the needs of students by treating each as a valued individual. Children need to know that they are seen and understood.

Collaborative. The phrase may be overused, but it *does* "take a village." D63 educators must be willing to work as a team to address the complex educational needs many students possess.

Self-reflective. The ability to look at one's skill set through a critical, constructive lens allows for self-improvement. We expect our team to continuously reflect on their performance, adjust, and hone their skills.

Innovative. Effective educators must constantly adjust to meet the differing needs of students—those who exhibit advanced skills and those who struggle. An openness to innovative ideas is essential in staying a step ahead.

Knowledgeable. A deep understanding of effective strategies and actions is key—for teachers, and, in fact, for all our new hires, from principals and social workers to secretaries and psychologists. Fortunately, we can and do build on employees' knowledge base after they've been hired.

At D63 the hiring process never ends: we continually seek outstanding candidates. Because empowering students to succeed in a changing world takes skilled, dedicated individuals with a drive to have a positive, lasting impact on the lives of children.

Scott W. Clay



DISTRICT NEWS: #63SUCCESS



ELECTED OFFICIALS IN THE HOUSE. In December, Nelson welcomed **U.S. Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky**, whose 9th District includes the school. Her busy morning included reading aloud to several classrooms, chatting with students (in English and Spanish), and fielding questions about government and what it's like to be an elected official.

Newly-elected **Illinois State Senator Ram Villivalam** stopped by Gemini in April. The Senator, whose 8th District incorporates most D63 schools, sat down with students and teachers to discuss key issues: from standardized testing to which Hogwarts House he favored ("Huffleclaw—I'm a hybrid.")



NOTHING BUT NET. For the first time in Gemini history, the 8th grade Boys Basketball Team ended its season in February as **Central Suburban Middle School Conference Champions** and **Conference Tournament Champs**. Go Mustangs!



COMING UP ROSES. Gemini's **Jennifer** and **Robert Wirtz** (who teach Language Arts and Math, respectively) are both recipients of **2019 Niles Night of Roses Dedication to Youth Excellence Awards**. Sponsored by the Niles Chamber of Commerce, the Award honors "an individual who fosters a positive environment to teach, educate, instruct, counsel, or inspire youth." School Resource Officer **Noe Hernandez** (center) received the **Night of Roses Public Safety Excellence Award**.

CHEM CHALLENGE CHAMP. A round of applause for 8th grader **Sarah Phan**, who finished 4th at the Chemical Education Foundation's Regional You Be The Chemist Challenge in April. She and fellow student **Dhaval Chauhan** placed into the regional competition as part of a Gemini team that competed on the local level in February.



CREATING PORTRAITS FOR A KINDER WORLD.

Nelson 6th graders spent countless lunch and recess periods creating special portraits for **The Memory Project**. Each was the unique image of a child living in a far-away Syrian refugee camp under difficult circumstances. And every refugee received their portrait as a special gift, helping them to feel valued and important.

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SCHOOL ROUND UP WINTER/SPRING 2019

Apollo (*Des Plaines*) When a September Des Plaines-area condo fire left 38 people homeless, our Apollo Ambassadors stepped up to help. After a successful fund raising drive, they presented a check for \$827 to the residents in January.

First Steps (*Apollo, Melzer, Washington*) Preschool parents joined students several times this winter and spring for Parent Participation Days. From March's Seuss-tacular Sensory Day to May's Wagner Farm visit, families learned together.

Gemini Junior High (*Niles*) The school's last few months as a junior high were busy. A highlight: the 40th Annual Charity Basketball Game on May 10 was one for the record books, raising more than \$4,800 for Lurie Children's Hospital.

Mark Twain (*Niles*) Students have formed lasting relationships with seniors at nearby Embark Senior Living. From Halloween parades to Valentine's Day crafts, you'll find our Cougars connecting with residents, who brighten with every visit.

Melzer (*Morton Grove*) In January, Melzer's Roaring Readers Team took home top prize in the Niles-Maine District Library's 2019 Battle of the Books competition. Winning students enjoyed a special ceremony with guest author Tom Watson.

Nelson (*Niles*) The school's 5th/6th grade Girls Volleyball Team celebrated a big win, ending the season as undefeated Conference Champs! The D63 Board honored team members in December.

Stevenson (*Des Plaines*) The last few months of school were bittersweet as Stevenson wrapped up its final year. The good news? All of our Stevenson stars will find new homes at Gemini, Apollo, Mark Twain, or Nelson.

Washington (*Glenview*) Bouncing back from burst pipes and flooding due to the polar vortex, our Wildcats celebrated in May when eight students traveled to Springfield to receive awards in the Illinois EPA Poster, Poetry, and Prose Contest.