



Gower School District 62
7700 Clarendon Hills Rd., Willowbrook, IL 60527
(P) 630-986-5383 (F) 630-323-3074
www.gower62.com



Superintendent's Report Board of Education Meeting – December 17, 2013 – 7:00 p.m.

Ambitious Instruction – *Classes are academically demanding and engage students by emphasizing the application of knowledge.*

- NWEA/MAP testing is scheduled to begin Jan. 13th at both Gower Middle and Gower West. Students in grades K-8 will be tested for academic progress in Reading and Math (~1hr. each); the Language Arts assessment will no longer be administered as part of the MAP schedule in Gower Schools.
- A proposal is being presented to the Board of Education to pilot ThinkCERCA in grades 5-8 for the remainder of the school year as an additional resource/support for student learning ([Appendix A](#))
- Students and Teachers (K-8) now have expanded access to Discovery Education Media that has been aligned to the Common Core State Standards (*streaming* has increased from the start of the school year)

Supportive Environment – *The school environment is safe, clean and conducive to student learning. Teachers have high expectations for students. Students have the support of their teachers as well as their peers.*

- Year to Date attendance rate is ~96.3% for the 871 students enrolled in the District and 96.5% for the 135.5 staff employed by the District. Student Attendance Goal = 96%+; District Staff Goal = 97%+
- District automatic calling system and email blast system protocols have been updated to ensure direct and rapid communication for information sharing as well as emergency/crisis management
- An internal review of our Special Education Program indicates the need to add additional support staff (A 1.0 Special Education Classroom Aide position will be posted to initiate a potential candidate pool)
- Facilities Update: 2012 Referendum Project contractor retention fees are being paid according to schedule and final work/projects are scheduled around school calendar ([Appendix B](#))

Involved Families and Community – *Strong relationships are built across the community to support learning.*

- Our Parent Visitation Day schedule resulted in 111 visitors at GM and 225 visitors at GW ([Appendix C](#))
- The PTO-sponsored Holiday Bazaar/Movie Night (12/6-7) and the Burr Ridge Park District/Kiwanis Club-sponsored Pancakes with Santa (12/7) were held at Gower West and attended by more 400 people
- Gower Choir (12/10) & Band (12/12) performances were well attended by parents/community members
- The District is working on a sponsorship for a scoreboard in the new gym at GM ([Appendix D](#))
- The 8th grade Career Fair at GM (12/6) hosted 13 speakers, including Burr Ridge Mayor, Mickey Straub
- Gower Middle School and Five Seasons Sports Club in Burr Ridge are working together to expand our physical education program to include collaborative units in tennis and fitness for our students

Collaborative Teachers and Staff – *The staff is committed to the school, receives strong professional development, and works together to improve the school.*

- Staff development on 12/6 provided time for our teachers (K-8) to collaborate on and upgrade lessons and units through Atlas Rubicon to the Common Core and 21st Century Learning Skills.
- Several of our staff have participated in “ off-campus site visits” to study the effective use of technology in the classroom, local 1:1 technology initiatives, and local STEM programs
- Ongoing training for teachers and staff continues on our transition to Gmail and the use of Google as an educational resource (Calendar, Documents, Shared Drive, etc.)

Effective Leaders – *School leaders work with staff to implement a clear and strategic vision for school success.*

- A student “Take the Tech Home” pilot is underway to collect student-generated usage data about possible devices for a larger scale implementation of using more technology in teaching and learning
- District leaders are working with Indian Prairie Public Library to submit a grant (ILEAD U) to secure resources for the increased use of technology and project-based learning (i.e. Science Fair/STEM)
- A review of our current transportation strategy has resulted in plans to reduce routes/cost ([Appendix E](#))
- Survey data will be used to review Capturing Kids Hearts implementation and overall district progress

**Gower District #62
Superintendent's Report
Appendix A**

Date: December 17, 2013

Title: Pilot Program Curriculum Recommendation (5 min.)

Initial

Contact: Rebecca Laratta: rlaratta@gower62.com

Background

Continuous improvement and looking for innovative ways to engage students and increase student learning are important goals of the administrative team and the teachers. INNOVATE 62 and the administrative team are working together to research new tools and resources that are cutting edge, engaging, and impactful. Over the summer, administrators met with external partners regarding these new tools and resources to benefit the students of Gower. The external partners are: DefinedSTEM, eSpark Learning, ThinkCERCA, and Stride Academy.

At the October 15th Board meeting, DefinedSTEM, eSpark Learning, and Stride Academy were recommended and approved for use. Each of these resources have been added to our existing curriculum.

Current State

ThinkCERCA is an online tool for grades 4-8. ThinkCERCA provides the tools and content that teachers need to deliver personalized critical thinking instruction across disciplines.

ThinkCERCA challenges students to read relevant, leveled texts, think critically, and develop evidenced-based arguments. ThinkCERCA features a data dashboard and student college and career ready portfolios that are maintained digitally. The English Language Arts teachers in grades 5-8 participated in a ThinkCERCA demonstration on September 26, 2013. The teachers believe this resource supports the demands of the Common Core State Standards by focusing on informational and argumentative texts and student writing with claims, evidence, and research from multiple sources. For more information about this powerful resource, the website is <http://www.thinkcerca.com>

Principal Tracy Murphy met with ELA teachers to determine how ThinkCERCA could be used within the classroom and throughout the grade level. The middle school ELA teachers are recommending the following pilot for the second semester:

- 5th grade: all students
- 6th grade: all students
- 7th grade: all students
- 8th grade: select students based on need

Principal Murphy and the ELA teachers believe this tool will be valuable to challenge students and provide another opportunity for students to think critically, collaborate, and further develop their writing. ThinkCERCA may also be used by students at home for further extending the

boundaries of the traditional classroom setting.

ThinkCERCA was also presented to the 4th grade team. While the teachers were very positive about ThinkCERCA, the recommendation at this time is to utilize Stride Academy, eSpark, and Defined STEM with their students and review the data collected from the 5th-8th grade pilot.

Future State

The administrative team is supporting the teacher recommendation for a pilot during the second semester. Teachers have learned how to set up their classes and make assignments on ThinkCERCA. Additional professional development on grading student work in ThinkCERCA is planned for January 17. Teachers are planning their first “CERCAs” for implementation in January.

The total cost for the proposed ThinkCERCA is \$4,635 and can be funded entirely through our local Education Fund. This proposal reflects introductory year pricing, which is pro-rated for the remainder of the fiscal year. Further implementation plans will be developed by the Administrative Team as the proposed pilot is carried out.

**Gower District #62
Superintendent's Report
Appendix B**

Date: December 17, 2013

Title: Facilities Update and 2012 Referendum Project (10 minutes)

Initial

Contact: Victor Simon – vsimon@gower62.com

Background:

Each of the previous Superintendent's Reports for the 2013-2014 school year has included a "construction update" to the Supportive Environment section. These updates have been focused on the 2012 Referendum Project. In March, 2012, exactly \$9,100,000 was approved through referendum to generate funds for District use for capital improvement. This remodeling and expansion project is in the final stages of work at each of our campuses and final payment to all contractors and partners related to the project are being made. To date, 99.2% of the construction costs have been encumbered/expended. A final summary of the 2012 Referendum Project finances is forthcoming to demonstrate the use of these funds.

This month, the "construction update" will include a "facilities update" as our 10-Year Safety Survey Report for the District has been reviewed and submitted to the Illinois State Board of Education by Ms. Carole Pugh, architect, Green Associates. The 10 Year Safety Survey Report includes three categories to describe facility issues. Category A issues are required to be addressed within a period of one calendar year. Category B issues are required to be addressed within a period of five calendar years. And Category C issues are not required to be addressed by the Illinois State Board of Education, but do indicate a need for a repair to eliminate the possibility of a building code or rule violation.

Current State:

Referendum Project:

- At Gower West, the existing security system in the District Office is being upgraded with work scheduled to be completed in the next 4-6 weeks.
- At Gower Middle School, the replacement of the carpet in the Main Office suite will be replaced with vinyl flooring on December 22-24, 2013. Plans are being drawn for furnishings in the Main Office area.
- At Gower Middle School, the existing security system (including motion detectors and cameras) is being upgraded between December 22, 2013 and January 6, 2014.
- At Gower Middle School, the lack of screening around the mechanical equipment (dust collector) on the south wall of the building (Industrial Technology) continues to be an issue as complaints have been filed with the Village of Burr Ridge Community Development Director, Mr. Douglas Pollock. The following correspondence was received on Dec. 6, 2013:



VILLAGE OF
BURR RIDGE
A VERY SPECIAL PLACE

7660 County Line Rd. • Burr Ridge, IL 60527
(630) 654-8181 • Fax (630) 654-8269 • www.burr-ridge.gov

Mickey Straub
Mayor

Karen J. Thomas
Village Clerk

Steven S. Stricker
Administrator

December 4, 2013

Mr. Victor Simon
Superintendent, District 62
7700 Clarendon Hills Road
Willowbrook, IL 60527

RE: Screening of Mechanical Equipment at Gower Middle School

Dear Mr. Simon:

I am writing to confirm our conversation of November 25, 2013 regarding the screening of the dust collector unit on the south wall at Gower Middle School. Section IV.X.3 of the Burr Ridge Zoning Ordinance requires that:

Ground-level mechanical equipment shall be completely screened from view from any adjacent private or public street or from any point along an exterior property line. The screen shall be of permanent construction material architecturally compatible with the principal building or be screened by the use of landscape material that affords a minimum of 80 percent opacity during the vegetation's dormant season. Minimum height of screening shall be at least one foot (1') higher than the object being screened.

I understand that due to winter weather conditions that the screening may not be provided until the spring. I would ask, however, that a landscaping plan be submitted for review and approval in sufficient time to begin work as soon as possible in the spring of 2014.

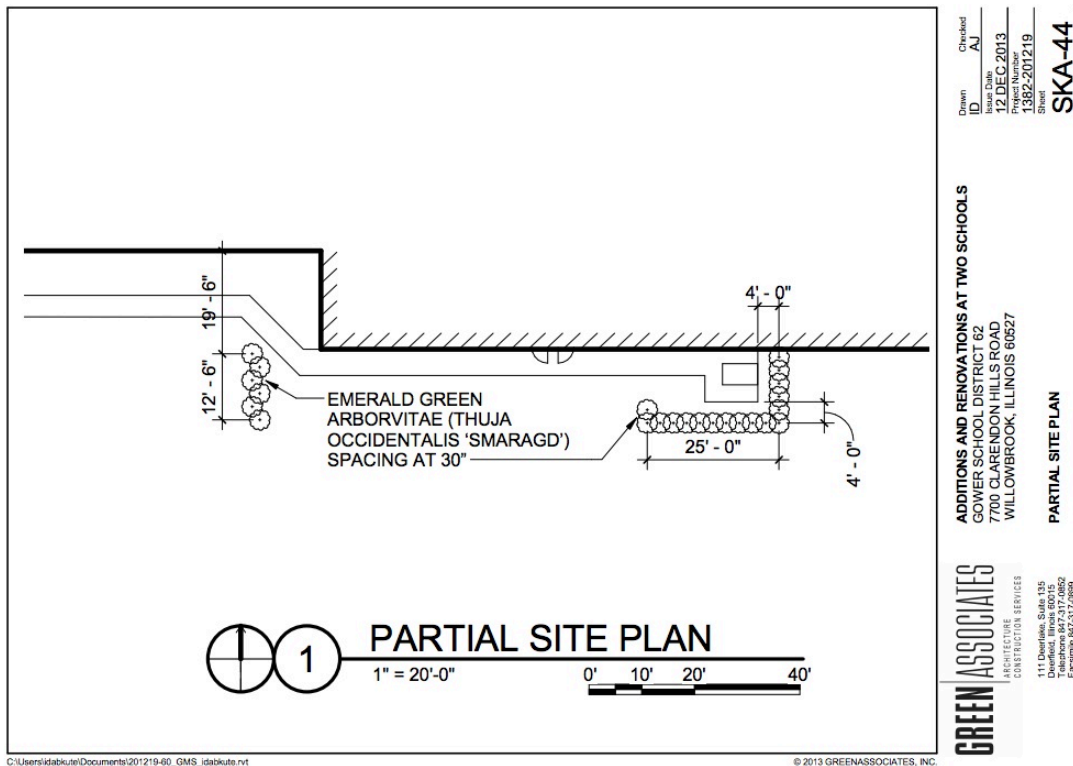
If I can be of any assistance, please call me at (630) 654-8181, Extension 3000 or contact me by email at dpollock@burr-ridge.gov.

Sincerely,

J. Douglas Pollock, AICP
Community Development Director

cc. Steve Stricker, Village Administrator
Cheryl Smith, Code Compliance Officer

The following rendering of an option to provide screening was shared with Mr. Pollock on December 12, 2013 with a request for written approval should the Board of Education agree with the interpretation of local Zoning Ordinance given the lack of legal clarity as to whether school district are subject to municipal zoning ordinances; particularly if such restrictions interfere are considered unreasonable. See http://www.franczek.com/frontcenter-Municipal_Zoning_Laws_School_Districts_IL_Attorney_General_Opinion.html for additional information. The District will move forward in collecting proposals and related costs once the plan has been approved by the Village.



Also at Gower Middle School, complaints regarding the electronic sign have been filed with the Village of Burr Ridge, claiming that the sign is in violation of the variance given. Specific complaints focused on the sign being powered on between 12:00 a.m. – 4:00 a.m. and including “animation”; both would be violations of the variance given. The sign is programmed to be powered off between 11:00 p.m. and 4:00 a.m. and there is no animation in the individual messages displayed. There is “transitioning between messages”, which has been interpreted by the Village of Burr Ridge as acceptable and not in violation of the variance given (per Mr. Doug Pollock; email received 11/25/13).

Ongoing “back-lighting issues” with the sign continue to interfere with clearly being able to read the lettering chosen. The issue has been determined to be a result of the font and size of the lettering selected. The District is working to address the issue. A change in the current lighting set-up (top, or front lit) is being considered along with a change in the current lettering.

10-Year Safety Survey Report:

Gower West: Category A (3 items); Category B (2 items); Category C (4 items)

Gower Middle: Category A (1 item); Category B (no items listed); Category C (4 items)

Category A items listed include the need for guard rails or catwalks to provide safety around rooftop units. Category B and C items listed include minor issues such as rusted roof ladder and masonry joint spacing (caulking).

Future State:

The District will continue to work to address all facility issues/concerns in a timely and cost-effective fashion. Regular reports for “facility updates” will continue to be presented to the Board of Education by the Superintendent. The 10-Year Life Safety Plan will need to be approved by the Board of Education as submitted.

Gower District #62 Superintendent's Report Appendix C

Date: December 17, 2013

Title: Parent Visitation Day (10 minutes)

Initial Contact: Victor Simon – vsimon@gower62.com

Background:

For each of the last 10+ years, Gower Schools have hosted a Parent Visitation Day to provide an opportunity for parents to demonstrate their support of their child or children's learning and to get a glimpse of what school "is like" in our District. This year, Parent Visitation Day was adjusted to address a series of concerns with hosting a full-day event as was done in previous years. The schedule at each campus was reduced to a 2-hour window to accommodate a long-standing and important tradition in Gower and, at the same time, address concerns regarding student safety preserving a productive learning environment. The following letter was sent to families on November 12, 2013 in an attempt to explain the adjustment and provide 1-week of notice.



GOWER SCHOOL
DISTRICT 62

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GOWER WEST PRINCIPAL

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November 12, 2013

Dear Parents and Guardians,

American Education Week will be observed November 18-22, 2013. During this week, you will have an opportunity to visit your child's school. You are invited to visit your child's classroom(s) on the following dates and times:

- Gower Middle: Tuesday, November 19, between 8:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m.
- Gower West: Thursday, November 21. Pre K-4th grade parents may visit classrooms between 8:30 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. Afternoon kindergarten and ECE parents are welcome to visit the classroom between 1:00 p.m. and 2 p.m.

A safe and productive learning environment is our number one priority in Gower School District 62. In order to ensure such an environment, the length of the Parent Visitation Day has been shortened from previous years. In addition, parents will be required to check in and check out at a designated area with their driver's license or state ID and be asked to wear a visitor's badge during their classroom visit. These modifications have been developed in partnership with the Willowbrook and Burr Ridge Police Departments to preserve a safe campus as well as offer parents the opportunity to visit their child's classroom during American Education Week.

- Gower Middle: Please enter and exit through the door (door #6) by the new gym. The parent check-in will be in the hallway.
- Gower West: Please enter and exit through the main door (door #1) by the school office only. The parent check-in will be in the Learning Center.

In order to preserve the instructional time, we ask that you enter the room quietly and use the seats provided in the classroom. During your time in the classroom, teachers may invite parents to engage in classroom activities or we may ask that you observe and enjoy the student learning that is taking place. We also ask that:

- Accommodations be made for younger children (toddlers and infants) to remain at home during the visitation
- Cell phones be turned off or muted during the time that you are in your child's classroom
- Pictures and videos are not taken during the visit to protect the privacy of other students

We hope that you will be able to spend some time with us during American Education Week. Thank you in advance for your cooperation and participation in this important program.

Yours in Education,

Victor Simon III

"Children at their best!"

Current State:

Both Parent Visitation Days were well attended and an optional survey was administered to parents as the visitation session ended to collect participant feedback (particularly important as there was a change to the traditional schedule of the event). The survey allowed participants to rate their experience using a 1-2-3-4-5 scale according to two questions: 1) Please rate your experience with Parent Visitation Day - 1 (Not a productive use of my time); 3 (Neutral); 5 (I plan to attend again!); and 2) My involvement in Parent Visitation Day has given me some ideas on how to better support my child - (Not at all); 3 (Neutral); 5 (Lots of ideas). The survey also listed the following prompt and space for additional comments: Please share any feedback with us as to serve the Gower School Community.

Gower Middle School hosted 111 visitors (~125 last year) and Gower West hosted 225 visitors (230 last year).

- At Gower Middle School, 52 surveys were collected.
 - Question 1 (Rating and # of respondents) – 1(2); 2(3); 3(1); 4(4); 5(42)
 - Question 2 (Rating and # of respondents) – 1(3); 2(3); 3(13); 4(17); 5(16)
- At Gower West, 111 surveys were collected.
 - Question 1 (Rating and # of respondents) – 1(2); 2(1); 3(2); 4(5); 5(101)
 - Question 2 (Rating and # of respondents) – 1(2); 2(1); 3(21); 4(37); 5(50)
- The optional “comments/feedback” section, when completed, provided an opportunity for the District to review the design of the Parent Visitation Day and determine opportunities for growth and development. Each survey was coded as a “positive response” or a “negative response” based on the ratings (i.e. 4+ = positive) and comments when provided. This cursory analysis resulted in 114 “positive responses” and 49 “negative responses” of the 163 surveys collected from both campuses.
 - Some common trends from the optional feedback shared:
 - 12 individuals specifically called for a return to a full day schedule
 - 4 individuals requested a schedule to accommodate more core classes
 - 29 individuals wrote a phrase or single sentence to the effect of “Great Job”; Thank you”; “It was fun to seen students/teachers in action”
 - 4 individuals requested a morning and afternoon session
 - 4 individuals specifically shared their appreciation for the shortened hours

Future State:

Overall, both Parent Visitation Days were viewed as a success. Direct observation of the event and a review of the feedback collected help substantiate this claim. With new Illinois State Board of Education requirements in place to design a Parent Visitation Day beginning next school year, our Board of Education has the advantage of several years of historical data for a full day program as well as more recent data collected to support a shortened event. The District Administrative Team recommends the continuation of an abbreviated schedule and will provide further detail to strengthen the program – based on the feedback collected – as the Board of Education will work to satisfy a regulation, which Gower School District has been far ahead of for some time.

Gower District #62 Superintendent's Report Appendix D

Date: December 17, 2013

Title: Scoreboard Sponsorship at Gower Middle (5 minutes)

Initial

Contact: Victor Simon – vsimon@gower62.com

Background:

After a recent review of records available, there has been no evidence discovered of Board of Education approval of “sponsorships” in Gower School District 62. Several partnerships exist with for-profit and not-for-profit organizations. The District also has a long history of accepting gifts and donations from various members of the community, external partners, as well as supporting organizations such as the Gower PTO and the Gower Foundation. There has been limited exposure to sponsorships that could potentially result in third-party advertisements on our campus. An example may be a local business that wishes to sponsor new furnishings or equipment with an expressed interest in displaying signage on or around are campus. Such agreements are common and are often seen in gymnasiums or playing fields.

Current State:

The new, East Gym at Gower Middle School is in need of a new scoreboard. Prices for equipment and installation begin around \$5-6,000 and could easily range upwards near \$20,000 or more. The cost of course, is dependent on the size of the scoreboard and the various features available. The following image displays the current scoreboard (8' x 8') used in Gower Middle's “old gym”, or West Gym:



Here are some images of other scoreboards of similar size/model that include advertisements from “scoreboard sponsors”: (Images courtesy of <http://www.nevco.com/gallery/>)



Future State:

The District has reached out to a potential sponsor for our scoreboard with the understanding that signage would be included for the sponsor to display as part of the scoreboard (similar to the images above). The District has enjoyed a long partnership with mb financial and is in discussion with representatives of the bank to determine if a sponsorship is possible. At this point, the Superintendent recommends that the Board of Education consider this and other possible sponsorships for the Gower School District. Currently, there is no policy or administrative procedure beyond the acceptance of gifts and donations. This situation highlights the need to have additional discussion about potential sponsorships and the details of such arrangements in our District. More information regarding the scoreboard in the East Gym at Gower Middle School will be forthcoming.

The Board of Education may wish to take action on an anticipated gift to the district.

**Gower District #62
Superintendent's Report
Appendix E**

Date: December 17, 2013

Title: District Transportation (5 minutes)

Initial

Contact: Victor Simon – vsimon@gower62.com

Background:

Gower School District has been purchasing 71 passenger school busses since 1989, or sooner. We currently have 11 buses in our fleet, all of which are owned by the District and operate 9 separate routes to provide transportation for our students. The transportation fee for parents/guardians has been \$100 for the first student, \$75 for the second student, and \$50 for the third and each additional student for the last five school years (since 2009-2010). Transportation fees have generated roughly \$55,000 per school year. Our fleet consists of a 2001, 2002, 2005, two 2006, two 2009, a 2010, 2012, 2013, and 2014 model year bus. Beginning in fiscal year 2011, (FY11; July 1, 2010 – June 30, 2011), the District began a practice of “1 year off - 3 years on” to continue the purchase of school buses. There was no bus purchased in FY11. However, a bus was purchased in each of the following consecutive years: FY12, FY13; FY14 and the Board of Education, and perhaps the Gower Community, may have the expectation that a bus will not be purchased in FY15 (next school year).

Current State:

- Our fleet of buses is aging and repair costs in FY13 were roughly \$36,100 with FY14 at \$20,500 to date (less than half of the school year). Furthermore, several of our buses are no longer covered by warranty resulting in the potential for expensive repairs.
- Our current routes may not be designed for optimal use of District resources. On average, our routes transport 37 students with a minimum of 22 students and a maximum of 49 students. On average, our routes are arriving to their respective campuses more than 10 minutes early (highly variable).
- The most recent bus was purchased for \$90,829.00 (less a \$2,500 trade-in for a 2000 model bus)
- The District has been working to build a more efficient transportation strategy including the possibility of leasing a bus fleet and reducing the number of routes.

Future State:

- Redesigning our bus routes is likely to result in 8 routes (closer “drop off” time to the start of school; an increase in the average number of students per route[+5]). There is a strong likelihood that such a change will take place this school year to immediately begin cost savings.
- An annual lease payment for a new, 71 passenger school bus, with a five year bumper to bumper warranty, is approximately \$12,500. Over the course of a 5-year lease, the District would pay \$62,500.
- A proposal is being drafted by the District to consider upgrading our existing fleet of school buses over a period of 4 years. Leasing five new buses in FY15 for a five-year period

(\$62,500/year for five years) and adding an additional bus according to a 5-year lease schedule for each of the following three fiscal years; eventually building the fleet to 8, leased school buses is one option being considered. Several of the existing buses in our fleet will be maintained as back-ups (similar to our current strategy).

- Approving such a plan will prove to be a cost-savings to the District in the long run and result in a more reliable fleet of school buses used to transport our students in Gower.

A more robust proposal is forthcoming. Appendix E of the December 17, 2013 Superintendent Report has been drafted to initiate the conversation and provide some detail for the Board of Education prior to any formal action taken.