

BEYOND THE BELL

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE SCHOOL DISTRICT 34 COMMUNITY • SPRING 2025

NEW-AND-IMPROVED LEARNING SPACES COMING TO D34

DISTRICT AND BOARD PREPARE TO LAUNCH MASTER FACILITY PLAN

District 34 has finalized its new Master Facility Plan, a comprehensive strategy and roadmap that will guide the future of D34 facilities for the next 20 years. The plan aims to enhance learning environments and upgrade aging buildings, with projects ranging from essential maintenance to renovations to new construction.

After a collaborative planning process that involved input from students, families and staff, the administration completed the Master Facility Plan late last year and presented it to the Board of Education. The District has taken the initial steps of approving the issuance of bonds and gathering Requests for Qualifications (RFQs) from architectural design firms. The District will fund the projects through existing bond capacity and new state-permitted self funding, avoiding additional taxpayer burden.

The Master Facility Plan outlines potential projects that could take place over the next 10 years. The first projects, which are scheduled for years one to three, include:

- **Improving the playgrounds at Hillcrest, Oakland and W.C. Petty Elementary Schools:** The projects would enhance safety and make the playgrounds at all three schools more accessible and up to date.
- **Providing security enhancements at Hillcrest:** The main entry and office would be updated to improve security.



MKM students

- **Replacing Mary Kay McNeill Early Learning Center (MKM) with a new school on a different site:** MKM is nearly 100 years old and was not intended to serve pre-k students. The new building would meet the unique educational needs of younger learners. It also would be more accessible and provide additional classrooms to accommodate increased enrollment. The District is recommending that the elementary kindergartens be moved to the new building to free up needed space in the elementary schools. (Read the story on P. 5 to learn about the vital role of early learning programs and why D34 is prioritizing the rebuilding of MKM.)

To read the recommendations outlined in the Master Facility Plan, as well as the potential timeline, visit www.antioch34.com/district1/master-facility-planning.



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SHOWING SCHOOL SPIRIT AND MAKING A DIFFERENCE ON D34 DAY

Hillcrest students display items they collected during the district-wide food and toiletry drive for Open Arms Mission and Antioch Traveling Closet. The drive was part of D34 Day in March. This annual celebration gives students a chance to show their school pride and take part in service projects that benefit the local community. Turn to P. 3 and 4 for more stories of giving back and other exciting news from the schools.

FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT



As we near the end of a busy school year, I am proud to look back on the many ways our students grew and excelled by taking advantage of hands-on learning opportunities in and out of their classrooms. We recently had the chance to show families their students' achievements in arts, STEM, literacy and more – through the Spring Showcases held in early April at each school. These annual events display the rewards of the hard work the students put in all year long. The showcases also remind us of the ongoing dedication and creativity of our teachers and staff. We are grateful for them, and for their partnership with the supportive families of District 34.

This issue of Beyond the Bell has many examples of students from all grade levels learning and growing – from becoming future tech trailblazers and poets to winning science and geography honors to volunteering their time. Take a few minutes to read these updates. And to see our student and staff successes in action,



Superintendent Aron Borowiak and some of his MKM friends.

be sure to come to downtown Antioch on May 3 for the Art Crawl, an all-day communitywide celebration of the arts in D34. Learn more on P. 4!

In this issue, you'll also find the latest news on our efforts to upgrade aging buildings by launching our new Master Facility Plan, which provides strategic guidance and a foundation for our future decision making. This proactive, long-term plan is closely aligned with the District's Strategic Plan, particularly with these goals:

- Providing state-of-the-art learning environments for students.
- Ensuring a safe and secure environment for students, staff and visitors.
- Enhancing our responsibility as stewards of financial resources by providing quality school environments focused on empowering students to learn.

We are proud of the Master Facility Plan, as we know it will have long-term educational and financial benefits for the community. I thank all of the stakeholders who have participated in the planning process that has brought us to this point. We will keep you updated on our next steps and as we begin the year one to three work outlined in the plan. Thank you for your support of D34!

Aron Borowiak
D34 Superintendent of Schools

FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT



'KIDS THESE DAYS:' A QUICK GUIDE TO DECODING TWEEN SPEAK



Age-old phrase: "Kids these days..." Every generation has uttered it, usually while squinting in confusion at whatever nonsense the younger crowd is

saying. And guess what? It's no different now. By the time kids hit fourth grade, they have developed a language that sounds like a mix of emojis, internet slang and a secret code meant to confuse parents.

As a parent and ELA teacher, I get it. Trying to communicate with tweens and teens can feel like attempting to translate hieroglyphics. But fear not! You can bridge the gap if you're willing to observe, "play along" and maybe embarrass them just a little.

Here's a quick crash course in "Kid Speak 101:"

Bet – Agreement, confirmation or "sure thing."

Parent: "Want to go get some Culver's?"

Kid: "Bet." (Translation: Yes, of course.)

Why are you even asking?)

Cap/No Cap – "Cap" means a lie; "no cap" implies truth.

Parent: "Mr. Koeune called about your grades today."

Kid: "That's cap. You didn't talk to him today." (Translation: I want to challenge your reality.)

Tweaking – Overreacting, being overly dramatic.

Parent: "Can you finally bring your laundry down?"

Kid: "Dad, quit tweaking." (Translation: Please do not bring this negative energy into my life.)

Minute – A long time. (Not literally 60 seconds, because that would make sense.)

Parent: "When was the last time you got your hair cut?"

Kid: "It's been a minute." (Translation: I can't remember, sometime before Christmas?)

You ate that – You did something exceptionally well.

Parent: "What do you think of my outfit?"

Kid: "Man, you ate." (Translation: Your outfit looks good.)

Crash out – Freaking out, losing it.

Parent: "How's studying going?"

Kid: "I'm about to crash out." (Translation: I am spiraling into academic despair.)

Facts – Agreement based on an opinion.

Parent: "I can't wait 'til summer break."

Kid: "Facts." (Translation: This is the truest statement ever spoken.)

Slang changes fast, so if you want to keep up, consider lurking on TikTok, Instagram or YouTube (but proceed cautiously—you might also stumble upon a dance challenge you did not need to see). And remember, it's okay to ask what a phrase means! Most tweens and teens love explaining their lingo—usually while sighing dramatically and rolling their eyes.

It's been a minute,
Mary Beth Hulting
D34 Board of Education President

'INSPIRE TO DREAM, EMPOWER TO ACHIEVE'

CREATIVE PROJECTS AND PROGRAMS BRING D34 MISSION TO LIFE



DISCOVERING NEW PASSIONS

1 *The next tech trailblazers:* Oakland is participating in the national Girls Who Code program, which aims to close the gender gap in tech by preparing girls to thrive and lead in coding and other computer science fields. Fourth- and fifth-grade girls are learning coding skills, designing animations, exploring algorithms and gaining confidence so they can embrace technology as they grow.



2 *Winter concerts wow the fans:* Hillcrest students, like these third graders, displayed their talents during February concerts where they sang, played instruments and soaked up enthusiastic applause from their families and fans.

3 *Brave young poets share their work:* An Oakland student shared her original poem during fourth grade's Poetry Café in March. She and her classmates created their own pieces of art and stepped up to the mic to bring their words to life, while the supportive audience sipped on café-style drinks to complete the coffeehouse vibe.



EXCELLING AND GROWING

1 *Students show their global geography skills:* AUGS students Lynkin and Mitchell competed in the Regional Geography Bee on March 1 in Lincolnshire, demonstrating their impressive knowledge of political, human, cultural and physical geography in all parts of the world. AUGS is proud of both geography whizzes and is celebrating Lynkin's accomplishment of qualifying for Nationals, which will be held in Orlando in May.



2 *Dominating on the mat:* The AUGS Wrestling team placed first in the conference, with seven wrestlers named champions and five advancing to state. AUGS held its traditional Running of the Warriors sendoff for the state gymnasts. Sixth grader Jaxon placed third at state.



3 *Young scientists represent D34 with pride:* The AUGS Science Olympiad team tackled challenges and earned medals in the Regional Competition held March 1 at College of Lake County. Team members demonstrated their knowledge of engineering, coding, cartography, ecology and more, as they competed in hands-on investigations.



GIVING BACK

1 Student leaders step up for others: Petty's fourth- and fifth-grade Student Council members volunteered at Antioch Traveling Closet, which provides clothing, shoes, toiletries and other essentials for children and adults. The students worked hard organizing items that will help local families in need.

2 Boosters lend a hand to Bernie's Book Bank: Hillcrest Boosters and families came together at a February volunteer event for Bernie's Book Bank. The helpers sorted books and filled bins, to help Bernie's distribute free, quality children's books throughout Chicagoland.

3 Creating a culture of kindness: Oakland took part in the weeklong Great Kindness Challenge, a global movement of more than 21 million students spreading kindness in their schools, communities and homes. The school kicked off the special week with a welcome parade, followed by fun themes each day and opportunities for students to make a difference for others.



ART CRAWL TURNS ANTIOCH INTO VIBRANT GALLERY AND LIVELY PERFORMANCE SPACE

The D34 Art Crawl, a popular community event that began more than 15 years ago, will take place on Saturday, May 3, with a new multicultural theme incorporated this year. The free event features student musical performances all day in the Antioch Bandshell, along with student art on display in the downtown businesses. There will also be a food truck, thanks to support from the D34 Band and Orchestra Boosters.

The Art Crawl is an annual tradition that transforms downtown Antioch. Many residents consider it a symbol of spring, as the performances are the first to be hosted at the Bandshell each year. All D34 schools are involved throughout the day, as well as local restaurants and stores, making it a communitywide celebration.

Sarah Amrein, Oakland music

teacher, says the Art Crawl is an opportunity "to share with the village some of the wonderful things the students are creating in our schools." She says the orchestra, jazz band, performance band, choir and general music classes will perform, including preschoolers from MKM Early Learning Center.

Art teachers Amy Pieniazkiewicz-Grude and Adam Reh say students begin creating their artwork in February. This year, they were asked to incorporate their cultures and backgrounds into their pieces, with a focus on identity, diversity and uniqueness in the community. "We want to embrace the ways our community is different and unique, and convey that everyone plays a role in making the world a beautiful place," Pieniazkiewicz-Grude says.

D34 SCHOOLS



Mary Kay McNeill
Early Learning Center
Pre-K
Jodi Lax, Principal



Hillcrest
Elementary School
Grades K-5
Holly Kaprosy, Principal



Oakland
Elementary School
Grades K-5
Anita Hernandez, Principal



W.C. Petty
Elementary School
Grades K-5
Joanna Gerritsen,
Principal



Antioch Upper
Grade School
Grades 6-8
Joe Koeune, Principal

OAKLAND TO WELCOME NEW PRINCIPAL, AS CURRENT PRINCIPAL BECOMES CURRICULUM HEAD



Starting this July, two District administrators will transition into new leadership roles. Oakland Principal Anita Hernandez will become director of curriculum and instruction, and Oakland Assistant Principal Lindsay Burns will take over as principal of the school. The administrative changes were approved at the Feb. 18 Board of Education meeting.

• New director of curriculum and instruction:

Hernandez moves into this role after serving as Oakland principal for two years. She has more than 10 years of



experience as a building administrator. She says she looks forward to having an impact on not just Oakland students but students at all five schools.

• Oakland principal:

Burns has served as Oakland's assistant principal for the past five years and has played an instrumental role in supporting students, staff and families, while also serving on the District's Data Leadership Team and Strategic Plan Committee. Before joining D34, she taught fourth grade in Beach Park for eight years. Burns has strong ties to



the local community. Her husband serves as an Antioch firefighter, paramedic and rescue diver, and she is the proud parent of a kindergartener and a one-year-old. She says she is excited for the opportunity to continue serving Oakland in this new capacity and looks forward to building upon the school's culture of collaboration, learning and student success.

"We are confident that Mrs. Burns' leadership, experience and dedication will ensure a smooth transition and uphold the standard of excellence at Oakland Elementary School," Superintendent Aron Borowiak says. "We have already begun the search for a new assistant principal and will share updates with families as soon as the process is complete."

THE FOUNDATIONAL BENEFITS OF EARLY LEARNING



Enhancing the District's programs for the community's youngest learners is a central part of the Master Facility Plan that the Board of Education recently approved (see P. 1). The plan includes building a new school on a different site, to replace the 98-year-old MKM Early

Learning Center, which was not intended to be a preschool and has many infrastructure and space challenges.

The new school will better meet the unique needs of early learners. This is a focus for D34 because of the vital role that quality early learning programs play in children's development and in boosting their academic achievement as they grow. This includes children as young as birth to age three, which MKM serves through the Early Start program.

Early learning sets a foundation for lifelong learning and success. Here are some of the specific benefits and the reasons that D34 has prioritized the rebuilding of MKM:

- Programs like Early Start foster a strong partnership and connection between home and school, providing families with essential support in the early years and facilitating the transition to preschool.
- Children who have early learning opportunities often have improved school readiness, enhanced problem solving and critical thinking skills, higher academic achievement and



Kindergarten students took part in a hands-on math lesson that involved comparing the capacity of different-sized containers.

- a decreased need for remedial and intervention services as they grow.
- Early learning can lead to significant gains for low-income and minority students and those with developmental delays, helping to narrow the achievement gap.
- Early learning boosts students' self-esteem, confidence and social-emotional skills.



MKM held a winter library outing for participants in its Early Start program.



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D34 MISSION:

We inspire our students to dream and empower them to achieve.

SERVING THE COMMUNITIES OF:

- Antioch
- Lake Villa
- Lindenhurst

KINDERGARTEN REGISTRATION OPEN NOW

Students must turn 5 on or before 9/1/25 to register for the 25/26 year. Scan the QR code to find more information and forms.



CHERISHED TRADITION COMING TO DOWNTOWN ANTIOCH ON MAY 3

The annual Art Walk will once again transform the downtown area with music and art created by D34 students. The community is encouraged to attend this free, all-day celebration on Saturday, May 3. Read the story on P. 4 to learn more about exciting plans for this year's event.



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