

# BEYOND THE BELL

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE SCHOOL DISTRICT 34 COMMUNITY • SPRING 2024

## MAKING MUSIC AND MEMORIES

IN SCHOOL AND IN LIFE, YOUNG MUSICIANS REAP BENEFITS OF RESPECTED D34 PROGRAMS

District 34's Band, Orchestra and Choir programs are preparing to showcase students' talents at in-school and community performances this spring. The performance opportunities illustrate the District's strong commitment to its popular music programs, which are respected for the quality instruction and academic and social benefits they provide – starting in the early years of elementary school and extending through eighth grade.

D34 students as young as first graders learn to play an instrument and perform. As they move through elementary and middle school, they are equipped with a solid music foundation, according to Brendan Frank, band director at Antioch Upper Grade School (AUGS). He says the extensive music opportunities have other far-reaching benefits, including introducing students

to diverse cultures; helping them develop essential skills like creativity and critical thinking; and creating connections and memories that are a big part of a young person's development. "Being involved in music gives confidence and a sense of belonging and community that can last a lifetime," says Frank, who also directs the extracurricular Jazz Band and teaches Music Technology.

Cindy Blachowski, AUGS Choir director, agrees the District's approach to music education inspires students and sets them up for future success, with many D34 students continuing to pursue music in high school and beyond.

"We partner with District 117 to help students successfully transition to high school," she says. "Many alumni have gone on to lead in musicals, perform at district and state levels, and receive music scholarships."

Orchestra director Brooke Tolhurst says D34's programs combine daily classroom instruction, lessons and group rehearsals, along with valuable performance opportunities. For example, the AUGS Choir Broadway Showcase was held in October, and the AUGS Jazz Band, Orchestra

Club and Choir performed at the Antioch Performing Arts Boosters Holiday Showcase in December. In February, the AUGS Jazz Band was invited to perform at the Evanston Jazz Festival, and the AUGS Orchestras performed a side-by-side rock/pops concert with Antioch



AUGS Orchestra

Community High School Orchestras.

D34 music educators agree that the parent Boosters and family-run fundraisers contribute to the vitality of the programs, providing things like new instruments and helping to offset the costs for students who need assistance.

On Saturday, May 4, the District will highlight the spirit of its music programs, when Band, Orchestra and Choir members of all ages come together for the annual D34 Art Crawl. This communitywide celebration features hundreds of young musicians in the Antioch Bandshell all day, along with visual art displayed around town.



### ADMINISTRATION

**Aron Borowiak**  
Superintendent

**Maria Treto-French**  
Assistant Superintendent/CSBO

**Josh Coon**  
Director of Technology

**Vasiliki Frake**  
Director of Student Services

**Kristina Guntharp**  
Director of Curriculum  
& Instruction

**Amy Mahr**  
Director of Human Resources

**Sara Elfering**  
Coordinator of Communication  
& Curriculum

**Susan Harkins**  
Coordinator of Student Services

### BOARD OF EDUCATION

**Mary Beth Hulting**  
President

**Lori Linck**  
Vice President

**Angela Baronello**  
Secretary

**Kelly Beall**  
**Josh Cornwell**  
**Tamar Lasko**  
**Michelle Ruminski**

### CONTACT

[www.antioch34.com](http://www.antioch34.com)  
847-838-8400

Follow AntiochCCSD34  
on Facebook.

## EXCELLENCE IN ACTION D34 MUSICIANS AMONG THE BEST IN THE STATE

D34 was honored this school year to have four AUGS students accepted into the prestigious Illinois Music Education Association (ILMEA) Junior Honor Band. Alex, Margo, Lilly and Trevor performed with other stellar musicians from across the state and learned from respected music educators at the November ILMEA District Festival and District Jazz Festival. The Junior Honor Band is known for its competitive nature, with students from all over Lake and Cook Counties auditioning.



# FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT



Welcome to the first issue of District 34 Beyond the Bell! I am pleased to launch this community report for all residents who live within our boundaries. This is YOUR school district, and we want you to be well informed about the many exciting things going on in our vibrant D34 community. We also want you to be aware of the challenges we face and how we are coming together with renewed energy and a shared commitment to living our mission of inspiring students to dream and empowering them to achieve.

One of the goals of our new Strategic Plan, which you'll read about on P. 5, is to communicate our successes and achievements while growing stakeholder collaboration. This report and our overall effort to rebrand D34 and unify our message are part of the strategy toward achieving that important goal. Thank you for taking a few minutes to read these pages. I hope you'll feel even

more informed about, connected to and engaged with D34 and our five schools.

On March 2, we celebrated our annual D34 Day, a chance to show pride in our schools and take part in community service projects. We held food and clothing drives, and I was so proud of the participation and enthusiasm. We also rolled out our new logo, which depicts five stars representing each of our schools and three swooshes representing our villages of Antioch, Lake Villa and Lindenhurst. The logo is part of our rebrand and featured prominently on P. 1.

This is my second school year as your superintendent, and I want to thank the community for the warm welcome I have received. Every day, I am inspired by our dedicated Board members, administrators, staff, families, community members and, of course, students who make D34 such a special place. We have made great progress in advancing our



*Superintendent Aron Borowiak hears Oakland students' ideas and answers their questions during his district-wide listening tour.*

vision, but there's still much work to do. I am honored to be on this journey with all of you!

**Aron Borowiak**  
*D34 Superintendent of Schools*

# FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT



For me, ringing in the new year is not just about making resolutions, but reflecting on all there is to be grateful for – and D34 schools are top of mind. It is not lost on me

that it's the people involved in our school community who contribute to the ultimate learning experience for our students.

My favorite part of each School Board meeting is during Board Recognition. This is a time when the Board can recognize individuals or groups who play a vital role in shaping the students' daily learning – whether it be through their leadership, volunteerism or simply providing students with valuable opportunities. With that, I want to offer each of you, our school community members, words of gratitude and thanks for your commitment to our students and schools. Think of this as Board Recognition in letter form.

To our educators, I express my humble appreciation for your tireless efforts. Your dedication to nurturing young minds and instilling a love of learning does not go

unnoticed. The impact on your students extends well beyond the classroom, shaping our society's future. To our administrators, thank you for carrying out the community's strategic mission and vision. Your unwavering leadership ensures that our schools continue to be illuminated with educational innovation, allowing students to dream and achieve.

To our community members, parents and guardians, your partnership in the educational journey is invaluable. Your involvement and continued support reinforce the sheer importance of a collaborative approach to discovery and learning.

Lastly, to our students, you are the heartbeat of our school community. Your curiosity and resilience inspire us. As

you work through challenges and obstacles, remember you have a community of dedicated individuals cheering you on, always.

Together, we are a collective force for stability and positive change. By embracing the opportunities ahead with enthusiasm and determination, we can shape the future and create an environment where every student grows and thrives.

As a Board, we encourage your attendance at District events and Board meetings, too! Come celebrate the excitement of our District's and students' success! #D34ALLin!

**Mary Beth Hulting**  
*D34 Board of Education President*

“ By embracing the opportunities ahead with enthusiasm and determination, we can shape the future and create an environment where every student grows and thrives. ”

## SALUTING OUR OWN: INAUGURAL NAME CEREMONY FOR MILITARY WALL OF HONOR

The new Military Wall of Honor at AUGS is “a powerful symbol of support” that inspires students while strengthening the bond between District 34 and its local heroes, according to Principal Joe Koeune.

The wall, which was unveiled on Veterans Day, honors District alumni who have served or are serving in the U.S. military. There is a section for every branch of the military, with space for honorary name plates in each section. An inaugural ceremony was held on Feb. 20, as 32 names were added to the wall.

The AUGS Choir and seventh- and eighth-grade Band members performed at the ceremony, with local veterans, students, government officials, Board of Education members, District administrators, staff and community members in attendance.

“Our Military Wall of Honor provides heartfelt recognition of the bravery and sacrifice of our service members,” Koeune says. “Our students and staff are proud to build this bridge of appreciation for those who have served for the greater good of our nation.”

AUGS science teacher Steve Gibson, a veteran, agrees that the wall is a fitting tribute for veterans who have been part of the D34 community. “Most veterans go years without a place to call home, as they generally leave their roots to travel the world,” he says. “This wall gives a place to honor their legacy and the sacrifices made for their country.”

“The Military Wall of Honor provides a valuable opportunity for educating young people about the importance of giving back, and honoring and respecting those who have walked the very halls of AUGS and devoted part of their lives to protecting our freedom,” adds Superintendent Aron Borowiak. “Those are important values that we have the opportunity to pass on to our students.”

Borowiak brought the initial idea for the wall to his team last spring. He says Maria Treto-French, assistant superintendent/CSBO, and Cuauhtémoc Mendez, operations and maintenance manager, along with Koeune, worked quickly to find a prominent place for the wall (outside of



*Dylan McCurry, Gunners Mate Chief in the Navy and a 2006 AUGS graduate, is one of 32 alumni on the Military Wall of Honor. He attended the ceremony with his family, including Kris Roeker (second from left), a D34 bus driver.*

the library) and get it constructed. Borowiak says he has been impressed with the level of support and enthusiasm among students, staff and the community.

The District will continue to collect names for the wall and add them annually during the AUGS Veterans Day reception. Names of veterans who graduated from District 34 can be submitted using the form at this link: [bit.ly/D34MilitaryWallOfHonor](http://bit.ly/D34MilitaryWallOfHonor).



## THRIVING UNDER PRESSURE

*There was stiff competition at the Petty Spelling Bee, with Abby (runner up) and Troy (winner) claiming the top spots. Hillcrest, Oakland and AUGS also recently held spelling bees, giving students the chance to develop their spelling, concentration, communication and public speaking skills.*

## MODERN MAKEOVER: AUGS UPGRADES ENHANCE LEARNING AND SAFETY

District 34 made progress last summer toward its goal of upgrading outdated school buildings to ensure they are safe and modern learning environments. More than two-thirds of AUGS, which was built in the 1970s, received renovations that promote collaboration, flexibility, comfort, safety and the use of the latest technology.

“The project had an ambitious timeline, with construction beginning in late May and wrapping up in time for the start of this school year,” says Principal Joe Koeune. He says students and staff have greatly benefited from the updates to 25 classrooms, four locker rooms and seven restrooms, plus the installation of new bleachers. The classroom work included new flexible furniture that allows quick transitions to promote creativity and collaboration, as well as technological upgrades that will enable more consistent use of high-tech tools such as interactive Promethean boards, according to Koeune.

Safety and accessibility were key priorities in the renovations. Bathrooms, locker rooms and the new bleachers now meet the current standard in design and are ADA compliant, and there is enhanced security at visitor entrances. Other improvements include upgrades to storage, lighting, paint and tiles throughout the building, as well as updated plumbing, electrical infrastructure, fire alarm systems and emergency back-up lighting.

Maria Treto-French, assistant superintendent/CSBO, says the work at AUGS was paid for using funds in District reserves. She says the project not only enhances learning and safety but saves the District money in the long term, by preventing costly emergency repairs to aging buildings. The District plans to continue to make necessary improvements districtwide. Administrators are in the process of assessing the buildings and creating a Master Facilities Plan to prioritize projects and determine funding needs. (See story, P. 5.)

## 'HAVE FAITH IN LITTLE PEOPLE'

OAKLAND'S NEW PRINCIPAL SAYS EARLY YEARS ARE KEY TO FUTURE SUCCESS

Anita Hernandez took the reins as the new principal of Oakland Elementary School last summer. She came to District 34 from Chicago Public Schools (CPS), where she was principal of Franz Peter Schubert Elementary School. She has also been a CPS assistant principal, Polish bilingual teacher, and middle school science and language arts teacher.

Hernandez was hired last April, after an in-depth selection process that involved the school's many stakeholders, including teachers, support staff, administrators, parents and students. "Anita was the most outstanding candidate and was chosen for her leadership experience, ability to raise student achievement scores and capacity for increasing community involvement and support," says Superintendent Aron Borowiak. "She's off to a great start this year and has been energized and focused on building relationships with Oakland students, families and staff."

Hernandez, who was born in Poland and came to the United States as a child, recently moved from Chicago to the District 34 community with her family.

Here's what she had to say about the transition to her new job and home:

**Q** What do you like best about being principal of Oakland and working with students in the K-5 age range?

**A.** The best part of my principalship is the students. Our students are kind, hardworking and amazing individuals. I know I will see them do great things in our community and beyond in the near future. I have spent the majority of my teaching career with second graders. It is my favorite grade. I wholeheartedly believe that a solid primary foundation is the key to academic success. My motto is: "Have faith in little people." They will surprise you as they reach and surpass any goals you set with them.

**Q** How did your previous CPS administrative and classroom experience help prepare you for your new role at Oakland?

**A.** My experiences in CPS as a second-grade bilingual teacher, middle school teacher, resident and assistant principal, and principal have grounded me in



Oakland Principal Anita Hernandez and one of her students.

my core values as an educator. All my decisions are made with a lens on students first, equity and an overall growth mindset. My experiences have provided me with a toolkit of strategies that helps me lead Oakland every day.

**Q** How do you like living in the District 34 community, and what do you enjoy doing in your free time?

**A.** We love living in Lake Villa. Exploring the lakes has been our favorite. Most recently, axe throwing with the Oakland staff at the holiday celebration was awesome!

## SOAKING UP SOME SUNSHINE

Spring is finally here! After working hard all morning, D34 students like these Petty Bobcats are eager to get outside with friends and make the most of their recess time.



## D34 SCHOOLS



Mary Kay McNeill  
Early Learning Center  
Pre-K  
Nikki Gardner, Principal



Hillcrest  
Elementary School  
Grades K-5  
Holly Kaprozy, 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

## STRATEGIC PLAN SIGNALS START OF TRANSFORMATIVE JOURNEY FOR D34

District 34's new Strategic Plan sets the stage for exciting educational initiatives and brings renewed energy to the mission of "inspiring students to dream and empowering them to achieve." The plan was developed after a collaborative process that involved input from many stakeholders, including Board of Education members, District administrators, teachers and staff, parents, residents and community partners such as local government officials, first responders and business owners.

"I'm proud of our Strategic Plan because I believe it reflects our shared values and commitment to uplifting students and the community," says Superintendent Aron Borowiak. "It was essential to formulate an updated plan that addresses current realities and challenges and provides the clarity and focus needed for transforming the District."

The new Strategic Plan identifies District 34's Core Values, Goals and Strategies for 2023 to 2028. The Goals and Strategies for "paving the way to

excellence" fall under three key pillars:

- Culture of High Expectations
- Structured Systems of Accountability
- Supportive Environment

Scan this QR code to read the District 34 Strategic Plan:



## FINANCIAL PLANNING INCLUDES PRIORITIZING BUILDING UPDATES

As stakeholders have worked to develop and implement the District's Strategic Plan and roadmap for the future, a similar effort has been underway to assess and prioritize needs in the school buildings and analyze funding options for future projects.

The District is creating a Master Facilities Plan that will be a blueprint for addressing updates or expansions over the next 10 or more years. The first step in this long-range planning effort is determining necessary projects, then exploring potential funding solutions that enable the District to continue to be fiscally responsible stewards of taxpayer resources. Funding sources could include current operations and/or levy funds, grants and asking the community to support a tax referendum.

"We have been proud to maintain a balanced budget for seven years, with healthy reserve funds that we used to complete important updates at AUGS last summer," says Maria Treto-French, assistant superintendent/CSBO. "But there are also urgent needs in our other aging buildings. We need to identify those projects, when we can take them on and how we can pay for them while minimizing the taxpayer burden."

### Key priorities include:

- Replacing or renovating Mary Kay McNeill Early Learning Center (MKM). The 98-year-old building was not intended to be a school and does not



*Students at MKM, a nearly 100-year-old building that the District hopes to replace or renovate.*

adequately meet the needs of pre-k and kindergarten students.

- Possibly expanding other schools that are reaching capacity as the community grows. This could include adding on to the AUGS cafeteria so it can hold a full grade level (several lunch periods are currently required to accommodate all students).
- Enhancing the Safe School Plan. This includes implementing additional security measures at all of the schools.

The District will present the Master Facilities Plan to the Board of Education by the end of the school year. The next step will be to finalize the list of necessary projects and discuss financial needs.

## SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER TO HELP KEEP BUILDINGS SAFE

The Board of Education voted on Dec. 19 to approve an intergovernmental agreement between District 34 and the Village of Antioch to provide for the shared use of a School Resource Officer. Beginning next school year, the officer will be based at AUGS but will also have a presence in the other schools to build relationships and awareness with the younger students. The officer also will address any safety/security issues that arise in any of the buildings and provide expertise and assistance with the development and execution of the District's Safe School Plan.

"This collaborative initiative represents a significant opportunity to strengthen relationships between law enforcement and students, fostering a positive environment for learning," says Geoffrey Guttschow, Antioch chief of police and interim village administrator. "Our successful SRO program in the high school district has shown that having an officer dedicated to building connections goes beyond ensuring physical safety; it serves as a catalyst for trust and understanding."

He says that in addition to security, the officer will be focused on being a positive influence, providing guidance and contributing to the overall well-being of students. "The presence of an SRO creates an invaluable bridge between law enforcement and students, breaking down barriers that might otherwise exist," according to Guttschow.



Antioch School District 34  
964 Spafford St.  
Antioch, IL 60002

Non-Profit  
Organization  
U.S. Postage Paid  
Permit No. \_\_\_  
Prospect Hts., IL

**D34 MISSION:**

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

**SERVING THE COMMUNITIES OF:**

- Antioch
- Lake Villa
- Lindenhurst



Science collaboration at Hillcrest.

# YOUR SCHOOL DISTRICT



Getting creative at MKM.



Total Enrollment

**2,633**

Student/Teacher Ratio

**16:1**

Spending Per Student

**\$14,000**

Student Attendance

**93%**

Teachers With Advanced Degrees

**60%**

Teacher Retention

**92%**

