

BEYOND THE BELL

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE SCHOOL DISTRICT 34 COMMUNITY • FALL 2024

THE MAGIC OF CAMP

SEVENTH GRADERS LEARN VALUABLE LIFE LESSONS AND SKILLS AT CAMP HENRY HORNER

Seventh grade is an important transitional year for students at Antioch Upper Grade School (AUGS). It's their second-to-last year of middle school and a critical time to further academic and social-emotional skills that will serve them well when they head to high school in two years. So there's no better time for the entire class to embark on a daylong outdoor adventure at Camp Henry Horner.

Located on Wooster Lake in Ingleside, not far from Antioch, the camp immerses its participants in nature and provides activities that promote cooperation, collaboration, teamwork, communication and leadership – such as ziplining, rock climbing, archery, a ninja course, log balancing, balancing boards and a tractor ride.

AUGS seventh graders spend time at Camp Henry Horner each fall.

“We think it's important to take this field trip in the fall to foster collaboration among students as the year is getting underway,” says AUGS Principal Joe Koeune. “The camp activities require them to communicate with one another and share ideas while working together to accomplish common goals. These kinds of experiences are vital to their success in middle school and beyond.”

In addition, Camp Henry Horner is fun and a highlight for seventh graders each year, Koeune says.

About 275 students attended the camp this year, with one day reserved for each team. AUGS teachers also attended, along with camp staff members who led the activities.



ADMINISTRATION

Aron Borowiak
Superintendent

Maria Treto-French
Assistant Superintendent/CSBO

Josh Coon
Director of Technology

Carole Allert
Director of Student Services

Kristina Guntharp
Director of Curriculum & Instruction

Amy Mahr
Director of Human Resources

Sara Elfering
Coordinator of Communication & Curriculum

McKenna Gomez
Coordinator of Student Services

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President

Lori Linck
Vice President

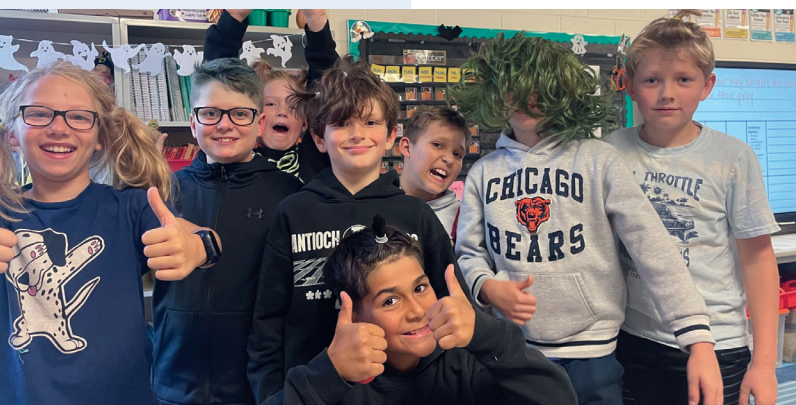
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CELEBRATING A BIG ACHIEVEMENT WITH A DAY OF WILD AND WACKY HAIR

After meeting their school-wide goal of 97% attendance this fall, Petty students earned a big prize – Crazy Hair Day! The entire school had a memorable time celebrating their significant achievement together. Turn to P. 3 and 4 for more fun news from the schools.

FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT



Welcome to D34 Beyond the Bell – the school year is off to a fantastic start, and we have so many exciting updates to share! Please take a few

minutes to read about the major honor for Oakland Elementary School for exemplary achievement, our efforts to support our large population of Multilingual English Learners and their families, and the extraordinary staff members receiving well-deserved recognition. You will also learn about our planning and preparation taking place to meet the needs of our aging buildings and more. We value our community and want to keep you informed about our accomplishments, celebrations and the challenges we are tackling together.

Please join me in welcoming new D34 staff members, including those who joined my administrative team this year – Mary Kay McNeill Early Learning Center Principal Jodi Lax (previously AUGS assistant principal), Director of Student Services Carole Allert, Coordinator of Student Services McKenna Gomez and

Coordinator of Multilingual Education Aimee Redding. These leaders, along with the rest of our stellar team, are making a significant impact on our schools, students and programming.

The District welcomed Officer Charles Schultz as D34's new school resource officer (SRO) this year. Our unique partnership with the Village of Antioch has made it possible for Officer Schultz to join us, and his impact has already been profound. With eight years in law enforcement, including five dedicated to the Antioch Police Department, Officer Schultz brings not only expertise, but also a warm, approachable presence to our schools. Stationed primarily at AUGS, he is visible across all our schools, building meaningful connections with students of every age. His commitment goes beyond safety; he has become a trusted figure to whom students feel comfortable turning for support and guidance. His influence is a testament to our shared commitment to building trusting relationships and meaningful collaboration.

The schools have been bustling with activity, as we work together to advance our mission of inspiring students to dream



Officer Charles Schultz, D34's new SRO, made the school rounds on Halloween and visited with some mini-Hillcrest officers who hope to follow in his footsteps.

and empowering them to achieve. I'm proud of our students, staff, families and Board members for working hard and supporting each other during these first months of the year, which have gone so fast! I wish our school community, along with the larger community, a very happy holiday season!

Aron Borowiak
D34 Superintendent of Schools

FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT



"CommUNITY" is a truly powerful word. When broken down, it means "together" and "united." But we are not just any community – we are

a school community, brought together by our diverse backgrounds, experiences and perspectives. As the president of the School Board, I wanted to take a moment to reflect on the essence of our school community and, more specifically, the significance of unity here in District 34.

Our school community is a living testament to the power of togetherness. Unity is more than just the absence of division; it's the presence of collaboration, respect and mutual understanding. It's about supporting one another, celebrating our successes and working toward shared goals. Whether through our parent-teacher

organizations, school events, concerts or volunteer initiatives, the spirit of unity is always present. When we work together, we model for our students the importance of cooperation and empathy – values that will guide them throughout their lives.

Our strength lies in our ability to unite with purpose, to advocate for what is best for our students and to ensure that every voice is heard.

“ Our strength lies in our ability to unite with purpose, to advocate for what is best for our students and to ensure that every voice is heard. ”

To keep our D34 community strong, united and ever-improving, I encourage each of you to:

- Participate in our school Booster activities
- Volunteer at one of our schools
- Share your concerns or contribute ideas through open dialogue
- Join us for D34-sponsored informational sessions
- Attend our music, sports and arts events
- Come to a School Board meeting

As a Board, we wish you happy holidays filled with health, family and friendship. Let's continue to celebrate the achievements of our district and our students. We look forward to seeing you and collaborating with you as the year progresses.

Mary Beth Hulting
D34 Board of Education President

D34 WORKS TO BE RESPONSIVE TO NEEDS OF GROWING ENGLISH LEARNER POPULATION

With more than 27 different languages represented in the schools, diversity in D34 has increased over the past 10 years. As the student population has grown and evolved, the District has made it a priority to be responsive to the needs of English Learners.

Aimee Redding was hired to fill the position, which is part time and shared with Lake Villa School District 41. Redding's responsibilities include working to improve student outcomes and fostering an inclusive and enriching educational environment. In addition, she co-leads the Bilingual Parent Advisory Council (BPAC), which is for families from D34 and Community High School District 117. The council meets four times a year to ensure families are well informed, and to gather feedback about improving support for EL students.

At the first meeting this fall, families from homes where Spanish is spoken as a primary or secondary language gathered to learn about District services and to share their experiences. Redding says BPAC gives bilingual families the opportunity to

learn about EL programming and give input on how they would like to see the program grow and change. "Our goal is for families' involvement to shape the content so that the meetings are meaningful to them," she says.

Redding adds that D34 is a multicultural school district that is home to more than 200 EL students. This includes a large percentage of Spanish-speaking students, but also those who speak Polish, Russian, Arabic and other languages.

As part of the District's multilingual efforts, Oakland Elementary School partnered with the Lake County Regional Office of Education to host "Welcoming Gustavo" authors Valerie Butron and Rita Guzman on Oct. 25. The authors read their heartwarming story of acceptance in English and Spanish, and talked to students about the power of stories in multiple languages and the importance of welcoming others.

Also as part of the multilingual outreach, D34's annual Art Crawl in May will include a new multicultural component, with students performing music and displaying art that



Author Valerie Butron greets Oakland students after reading her bilingual book, "Welcoming Gustavo."

celebrates diverse cultures.

For more information on these and other initiatives, or to join BPAC, contact Redding at aredding@antioch34.com.

Scan the QR code to read a Spanish-language version of this story. |

Escanee el Código QR para leer la versión en Español de esta historia.



STUDENT TALENT ON DISPLAY THIS FALL

Students in Band, Orchestra and Choir have been showcasing their musical talent and hard work this fall, including at the D34 Annual Military Wall of Honor Ceremony held at AUGS on Nov. 12 (pictured). The music programs, which serve students from elementary through middle school, will present other in-school and community performances in December and throughout the spring.



FAMILIES GO ALL OUT FOR HILLCREST HALLOWEEN BASH

Hillcrest Boo Bash and Trunk or Treat delighted Halloween fans of all ages, with creative cars and costumes – plus lots of candy – capturing the spirit of the season.

OAKLAND PLACES IN TOP 10% OF ILLINOIS SCHOOLS

Oakland Elementary School has earned the esteemed designation of Exemplary on the 2024 Report Card recently released by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). This honor, which places Oakland among the top 10% of schools in Illinois, reflects success in meeting a wide range of educational goals related to academic excellence, student growth and providing a supportive learning environment.

The ISBE Report Card is released annually, with school ratings based on measures of success such as proficiency in English Language Arts (ELA), Math and Science; student attendance; and progress toward English language proficiency. The designation of Exemplary is difficult to attain, given the rigorous criteria and comprehensive evaluations that must be met, according to Superintendent Aron Borowiak. He says the designation signifies that Oakland has no underperforming student groups and ranks in the top tier of all schools in the state.

Anita Hernandez, Oakland principal,



Oakland Assistant Principal Lindsay Burns, Oakland Principal Anita Hernandez and D34 Superintendent Aron Borowiak celebrate the school's recent Exemplary designation from the Illinois State Board of Education.

praises the school's staff, students and families for their collective efforts: "This recognition is a testament to the dedication of our teachers and staff, the perseverance of our students and the unwavering support of our families. It's an achievement we can all be proud of, and it truly reflects the outstanding learning community we have built at Oakland."

CONGRATS TO THE 2024 INSPIRING TO DREAM HONOREES!

Ten District 34 staff members, representing every school, have received 2024 Inspiring to Dream awards, in recognition of their passion for bringing the spirit and mission of D34 to life. This staff recognition program was started last year to honor those who go the extra mile to inspire, guide and encourage students. The program stems from the new Strategic Plan, which includes the goal of fostering a Supportive Environment with enhanced recognition of staff. This year's honorees are (left to right): Roger Bond (Oakland bus driver), Erick Olmos (MKM head custodian), Jillian Pullen (AUGS head custodian), Melissa Stetkus (AUGS teacher), Olivia Mallery (Petty teacher), Andrea Jordan (Petty paraprofessional), Darcy Pelayo (Oakland teacher), Barb Scheuerman (Hillcrest teacher), Kristina Baylen (Hillcrest paraprofessional) and Marie Hanrahan (MKM teacher).



GOING RED FOR RED RIBBON WEEK

MKM Early Learning Center students proudly dressed in red for Red Ribbon Week in October. All D34 schools took part in this national weeklong celebration that promotes making healthy choices.



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

FUTURE-FOCUSED MASTER FACILITIES PLAN TO IDENTIFY LONG-TERM NEEDS AND FUNDING OPTIONS



District 34 is preparing to finalize the Master Facilities Plan that will outline and prioritize infrastructure needs in the District's schools over the next 20 years. The plan is a long-term blueprint for ensuring the District keeps buildings safe and up to date, while remaining a responsible steward of taxpayer dollars.

The planning process has included surveys and focus groups with students, staff, community members and the Board of Education. These stakeholders have helped identify the most urgent needs and potential funding sources. The District has partnered with Green Associates, a design firm that specializes in education, to help assess the input and create a draft of the Master Facilities Plan.

The draft will be presented to the Board during its meeting on Tuesday, Dec. 17 (6:30 p.m. at Oakland, 818 E. Grass Lake Rd., Lake Villa). Board members and administrators are expected to provide recommendations on next steps, as they work toward implementing the final plan in the spring.

Superintendent Aron Borowiak says there are significant priorities that need to be addressed in the District's aging buildings, including: replacing or renovating 98-year-old Mary Kay McNeill Early Learning Center, possibly expanding other schools that are reaching capacity as the community grows, and implementing additional security measures.

"We have maintained a balanced

budget with healthy reserves, and that has enabled us to complete some necessary building updates," Borowiak

says. "But now we must prepare for the future by planning for other urgent needs and looking at funding options."

SCHOOL FINANCE... YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

Q ■ What are the primary sources of funding for D34?

Property taxes account for the majority of the District's funding, and the amount received is based on the total property value within D34 boundaries, as well as corresponding tax rates as determined by a formula established by Illinois School Code. Property taxes represent nearly 74% of District revenue, followed by 18% from state appropriations and 8% from federal aid.

Q ■ How is D34's funding allocated? Is there a balanced budget?

A large percentage of the funding is used to pay salaries and benefits, and the rest is used for operating and maintaining the buildings and paying for equipment and supplies. D34 is proud of its track record of smartly allocating limited resources and maintaining a balanced budget for the past seven years.

Q ■ Are there reserves?

The District has healthy reserve funds, or fund balances, that are set aside primarily for emergencies. The District has been able to use some of the reserves for important facility updates, such as the 2023 projects that enhanced safety and learning at AUGS. Modern upgrades such as lighting and HVAC systems save energy costs and prevent costly emergency repairs in the future.

Q ■ Can the reserves be used to rebuild or renovate MKM Early Learning Center (one of the priorities expected to be included in the Master Facilities Plan)? What are other funding options?

The reserves are not sufficient for a project of that scope. A new Illinois law gives school districts more flexibility for undertaking building projects, including eliminating the need for referendums for building or purchasing additional space for pre-k or kindergarten classrooms. This makes it possible for districts to meet the demand for early childhood programs with little to no impact on taxpayers. As District leaders finalize the Master Facilities Plan, they are analyzing this legislation and exploring funding options.



PRESTIGIOUS STATEWIDE HONOR FOR D34 BOARD



The District 34 Board of Education has once again earned a School Board Governance Recognition designation from the Illinois Association of School Boards. The Board is one of 46 in Illinois to receive the prestigious honor for 2024, in recognition of positive community impact and exceptional local school governance that supports quality public education. The D34 Board includes: (back row, left to right) Tamar Lasko, Mary Beth Hulting, Josh Cornwell and Lori Linck and (front row, left to right) Angela Baronello, Kelly Beall and Michelle Ruminski.



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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



AUGS first day

STRONG START FOR THE 2024-2025 SCHOOL YEAR

D34 kicked off the new school year with an August in-service event that brought all staff together for a rewarding day of learning and collaboration. Then the District welcomed 2,619 pre-k through eighth graders, who seemed excited to greet friends and teachers and get to work. Read this newsletter to learn what students and staff have been up to so far this year. News inside includes:

- A big honor for Oakland
- Growth in multilingual programs
- Staff who inspire us to dream
- Crazy Hair Day, Red Ribbon Week, Boo Bash and other school fun
- And much more!



Oakland first day



School year kickoff for staff



AUGS first day