



# 63 SUCCESS

SUMMER 2025 • EAST MAINE DISTRICT 63

*As we kick off the 2025-2026 school year, we've taken "Inspire" as our theme. But what does that mean to our students, parents, and staff? Here's what a few of them had to say about how D63 inspires them.*



# inspire



## Monica Glavin

Mark Twain parent | Board of Education Member

Although I didn't attend D63 schools, my siblings did—and I grew up in this District. When I had my own children we moved back into the area because I wanted them to have the rich, diverse experience that comes along with attending these schools. And it has lived up to my expectations.

What really stands out is the commitment and dedication teachers and principals show for every student - even during very challenging times. My oldest started 1<sup>st</sup> grade remotely during the pandemic and he was having trouble reading. Twain connected us with a specialist who provided one-to-one assistance and he quickly caught up.

I will always be grateful, and it truly inspired me—so much so that last year I ran for the Board of Education because I wanted to do my part to maintain this District's excellence and help it grow.

## Melisa

Gemini 8th grader



I've been here at District 63 since preschool—then at Apollo and Gemini. Now I'm starting 8th grade. This District and its wonderful teachers have helped me discover myself and my passions.

D63 is filled with opportunities, from being a part of the Dual Language Program and challenging myself with advanced math to orchestra and wrestling!

It was in 5th grade that I remember my teachers really started to inspire me to achieve more and do better academically. Teachers have always let me know my potential and helped me reach it. I can't wait to further discover myself especially with the head start D63 has given me.



## Justin Tew

Washington Math Specialist

In 2014, I re-entered the world of education after 11 years as a singer/dancer. District 63's welcoming and supportive environment quickly stood out. I began my journey here as an assistant in a Washington special needs classroom and over the next eight years taught 1st grade and in what was then the new full-day kindergarten program. It was a wonderful experience: I did indeed feel welcome, supported, and celebrated.

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EMPOWERING ALL STUDENTS TO SUCCEED IN A CHANGING WORLD



## FROM PRESIDENT TOM SIMMONS

### Stepping into a New Role

I'm no stranger to District 63. For more than 48 years I've been volunteering in various capacities. I'm a proud alumnus of Melzer School and the former Apollo Junior High (now Apollo Elementary)—and my children attended District schools as well. In 2007 I was elected to the East Maine District Board of Education.

Now, I'm excited to share that I'm taking on a new role. After serving for 18 years on the Board, most recently as Vice President, I'm honored to step into the role of Board President.

Volunteers—and although Board members are elected, they are volunteers—tend to stay over the long-term when causes speak to their hearts, and there's a reason I've remained involved with this District for so many decades: its commitment to educational excellence.

First as a student, then a parent, and now a Board member, I've seen first-hand the laser focus our educators and administration puts on supporting each student's pathway to success. And I've worked with so many Board members who share that commitment, dedicated to ensuring that the community we serve has access to exceptional schools, teachers, and leaders.

I look forward to continuing this work alongside my fellow Board members as well as administrators, teachers, and support personnel.

Our goal is to provide each student with educational opportunities to be successful, both academically and socially. But it takes a village (or, in our case several villages) and parent and community support is essential in achieving this goal!

On behalf of the Board of Education, I hope you had a happy and safe summer, and look forward to welcoming students and families back to school in August.

*Inspire—Continued from page 1*

**Justin Teus . . .** But life happens and in 2023 I stepped away to care for my two young children. That, too, has been wonderful. But the staff, students, and families at District 63 truly inspired me as an educator, so much so that I'm returning this year as a Math Specialist. I can't wait to rejoin this amazing community!

## Kasia Gold

**Nelson Librarian | former Melzer & Gemini parent**



I have a 15-year history with D63: both my kids attended Melzer and Gemini. The teachers were dedicated to their educational success and encouraged them to pursue their passions - even beyond the classroom. My older son, for instance, still cherishes memories of performing in homeless shelters and nursing homes with the Gemini orchestra.

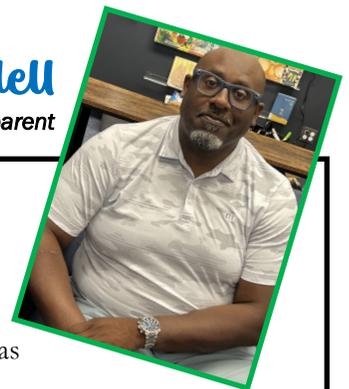
I was a new parent navigating a new language, and the school was so welcoming. It was easy to get involved. So, I served on the PTO, and eventually became a teaching and library assistant.

I wouldn't be here today if it weren't for D63. I fell in love with the library profession by volunteering in the school library. And encouragement I received from my former principal gave me the confidence to pursue a career in education.

District 63 has inspired me in so many ways. I am beyond excited to return, this time as Nelson Librarian, and grateful for this full-circle moment.

## Jamal Liddell

**Former Apollo & Gemini parent**



Our youngest child graduated from Gemini in June and his big sister graduated in 2019. From the years at Apollo our experience has been exceptional.

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## NEW D63 BOARD MEMBERS & NEW ROLES



### TOM SIMMONS • *BOARD PRESIDENT*

A lifelong District resident and Board member since 2007, **Tom Simmons** was seated as Board President in May. He attended Melzer and what was then Apollo Junior High, and his five children attended Nelson, Washington, and Gemini. A Glenview resident, Simmons volunteered for 18 years in the schools as a math and reading tutor before joining the Board; he has served on the District 63 Education Foundation Board since 2000. Formerly Senior Vice President for Cole Taylor Bank, Simmons attended Herbert V. Prochnow Graduate School of Banking at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.



### KATIE ANDERSON • *BOARD VICE PRESIDENT*

**Katie Anderson**, appointed to the Board in October 2018 and then first elected to a full term in 2019, was seated as Vice President in May. A Morton Grove resident since 2015, Anderson currently serves as the Board's delegate to the Illinois Association of School Boards (IASB) and on the District's Student Discipline Advisory Committee. An active volunteer at her church and a past American Youth Soccer Organization Board member, she holds bachelor's degrees in English and in marriage, family, and human development from Brigham Young University. Two of her children attend Melzer; one is a Gemini graduate.



### REBECCA OLSON • *BOARD MEMBER*

Elected to the Board in April 2025, **Rebecca Olson** has been a District resident since 2009. She has one child at Washington—another is a Gemini graduate. Olson currently serves as Planning Manager for the federal General Services Administration (GSA), managing relations with the Great Lakes Region Judiciary and Social Security Administration. An active Washington and Gemini PTO member, she holds a bachelor in fine arts degree from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.



### MONICA SLAVIN • *BOARD MEMBER*

**Monica Slavin**, a Park Ridge resident, was elected to the Board in April 2025. She has lived in District 63 since 2000; her two children attend Gemini and Mark Twain, where she is a member of the PTO. A Maine East High School graduate, Slavin is Director of Affordable Housing Compliance at the real estate firm Related Management Company, and formerly worked with the Housing Authority of Cook County. She earned her bachelor's degree in economics at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

## Welcome to New Gemini Principal Dr. Lexi Oreluk

Formerly Principal of Willow Springs School District 108, **Dr. Oreluk** began her career as a special education teacher at North Palos School District 117 in Hickory Hills. She moved on to serve as assistant principal in two districts, Frankfort Community Consolidated School District 157-C and Elmwood Park Community Unit School District 401, before joining Willow Springs in 2021.

After completing her bachelor's degree in special education at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Dr. Oreluk earned a master's degree in principal preparation from Concordia University Chicago. She also holds a doctorate in leadership and learning in organizations from Vanderbilt University.



*Inspire—Continued from page 2*

**Jamal Eiddell . . .** As a younger child in kindergarten our son didn't really make friends. And his 1st grade teacher was aware of this. So that teacher took it upon herself to make sure that my son was more involved in class, didn't sit on the sidelines, and had the chance to make good friends. Those friends have been long-lasting—all the way through to his graduation from 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

Our daughter was fully prepared and ready to achieve when she went to Maine East and I am confident that our son is ready to do the same.

District 63 inspires me because it widened our kids horizons and got them ready for life at the next level in high school. Truly, it gave them an excellent foundation for the years to come.



**Cathy Reiff**  
Nelson Instructional Coach

**I** joined District 63 in 2006 and since the start, my work as an educator has been valued.

A few years ago, my principal and I had a conversation about making our book room and classroom libraries reflect our students' lived experiences - and the Nelson KidLit Book Club was born!

Children's literature is my passion and at each Club meeting I share that passion with teachers. We discuss the importance of that trimester's story and how they can share it with their students.

It is truly inspiring to work with colleagues who want to connect with students through books and with a leader who implements simple, yet impactful changes.



**FROM  
SUPERINTENDENT  
DR. SHAWN  
SCHLEIZER**

## Building for Learning

**T**here is a common misconception that school districts “go dark” over the summer but nothing could be further from the truth. Here at District 63 we immediately spring into action, planning for the upcoming school year, and this summer alone we welcomed more than 900 students for our Summer Learning Program. Another 330 spent their days enjoying our Expanded Learning Summer Camp—and our Summer Music Program gives students a head start on Band and Orchestra.

We also tackle a wide range of building improvements for obvious reasons: it's much easier to replace roofs, re-do parking lots, and create or upgrade learning spaces when most of our schools are empty.

This summer, while touring our buildings and reviewing construction progress, I reflected on the profound impact learning spaces and environments have on student success.

But what does that really mean? How, precisely, does the physical environment support learning? Here are a few examples:

- Flexible learning spaces are easy to adapt as curricula change—and support students' needs.
- The learning environment significantly influences students' capacity to learn. Color, acoustics, temperature, natural light, and furniture selections can impact mood, concentration, and successful collaboration.
- Our school community is committed to inclusivity, ensuring all students, including those requiring elevator access or alternative entryways, have their needs met.

District 63 maintains a “rolling facilities plan” because not everything can be achieved in a single summer.

But over time, our plan is to ensure that the heating and cooling systems stay in good working order—and our classrooms, libraries, music rooms, gymnasiums, and study spaces keep pace with our understanding of how these spaces interlock with and support our work to help students achieve success without boundaries.

## DISTRICT NEWS: #63SUCCESS



### CHARITY BASKETBALL GAME SUPPORTS LOCAL

**NONPROFIT** • D63's charity basketball game returned for its 44th year on May 10. Sponsored by the Gemini Student Council, the game pitted Gemini staff against staff from D63 elementary schools and First Steps Preschool—all in good fun. Students, staff, and families enthusiastically cheered on their teams, and the event raised **\$4,120** for **Wings Program, Inc.**, which provides food, shelter, and support to victims of domestic violence.

### FAMILY FUN FEST BENEFITS FOUNDATION •

Area residents enjoyed rides, carnival treats, and a fun-filled weekend during May's Family Fun Fest at Golf Maine Park. And a portion of the proceeds benefitted D63! The District's Education Foundation coordinated the event with Fantasy Amusement Company, **ultimately netting approximately \$20,000**. Funds will support Expanded Learning scholarships, the Family Resource Center Marketplace—which provides food and household goods to D63 families in need—and other D63 initiatives that help our community



### CELEBRATING OUR GEMINI GRADS •

More than 370 8th graders crossed the stage at Maine East on June 5, graduating from Gemini—and from District 63. The ceremony featured remarks by outgoing **Principal Lewis Roberts**, **Superintendent Dr. Shawn Schleizer**, and **Board of Education President Tom Simmons**. Graduate **Franz Rafael** shared warm and wonderful words in his address to students; other student speakers included **Miles Anderson** and **Rianna Varghese**. Congratulations to the Class of 2025!

## Welcome to New Gemini Assistant Principal Matthew Hurley



**Matt Hurley** formerly served as Modern World Languages & Culture Department Chair and a German teacher at Cincinnati's Walnut Hills High School. Before joining Walnut Hills in 2019, he was a foreign language teacher at Roncalli High School in Indianapolis.

Hurley holds a bachelor of science in education degree from Indiana University, where he also majored in German, and two master's degrees: one in Germanic studies from Middlebury College in Vermont, a second in educational leadership from Miami University of Ohio.

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