



FIRST EDITION, WINTER 2025/2026

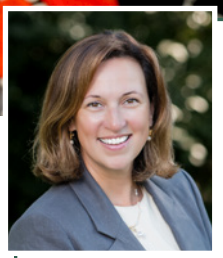
# THE BEACON:

## THE SUPERINTENDENT'S EXECUTIVE REPORT

*Illuminating Progress. Leading with Purpose.*



**100**  
YEARS  
OF  
PROGRESSIVE  
EDUCATION



### A Message from Dr. Kelly Tess, Superintendent of Schools



#### Dear Winnetka Families, Staff and Community,

The Winnetka Public Schools have long been referred to as a “lighthouse district.” A lighthouse stands steady, illuminating the path through changing tides and unseen currents. In Winnetka, our century-long commitment to public Progressive Education has served as that guiding light, inspiring excellence across generations.

With this new annual report format, I am sharing an at-a-glance overview of how our educators are advancing that legacy with focus and intention. The annual report links to our Strategic Plan 2025-2030 and articulates the work we have identified as most impactful on student outcomes. We are committed to fostering authentic student engagement, exceptional teaching and learning opportunities, enhanced community partnerships, a culture of well-being and the careful stewardship of financial resources. Together, the Administration and Board are focused on ensuring The Winnetka Public Schools continue to serve as a beacon in public education, firmly rooted in a progressive philosophy of instructional delivery.

In the following pages, you'll find further details on progress toward our recently launched Strategic Plan, pertinent news and many milestones to celebrate. Thank you for your continued dedication to The Winnetka Public Schools.

Most Sincerely,

*Dr. Kelly Tess*

Dr. Kelly Tess  
Superintendent of Schools



*You get to be curious here*

-Fifth grade student



#### IN THIS ISSUE

##### **Pages 2-3**

Celebrating the Conclusion of  
Referendum-Funded Construction

##### **Pages 4-5**

The Winnetka Public Schools  
Implement Strategic Plan 2025-2030

##### **Pages 6-7**

By-the-Numbers: Year in Review

##### **Page 8**

Key Performance Indicators Report  
Student Ambassadors Program  
Founded in Partnership with National  
Junior Honor Society

##### **Page 9**

Full Day Kindergarten Launches  
in 2026/2027  
Attendance & Assessments Matter  
Adventures in Learning 2026

##### **Pages 10-12**

Our Year in Pictures



# THANK YOU

## Winnetka Community!

On behalf of the students, families and staff at The Winnetka Public Schools, we want to thank you for your continued support of our schools, notably through the approval of the 2022 Referendum. This community has built an historic legacy of fostering excellence in public Progressive Education and we are grateful for your investment in the future of our schools.

Thanks to your generosity, we were able to make crucial improvements which have upgraded safety and security, improved accessibility, enhanced learning environments, and strengthened educational opportunities for every student. We are immensely grateful for how this referendum-funded work will positively impact generations of Winnetka students.

Most Sincerely,

*Dr. Kelly Tess*

Dr. Kelly Tess, Superintendent of Schools

*Mr. Dan Waters*

Mr. Dan Waters, Board President

“  
*Crow Island  
is now a 10/10!*  
-Third grade student  
”

**SCAN TO VIEW**  
a documentary  
chronicling the  
construction process  
and newly unveiled  
spaces in The Winnetka  
Public Schools.



Photos (at right) depict activities in the new gym, classrooms, and refreshed Resource Center at Crow Island; fun on the new playground at Hubbard Woods; and the construction planning process.

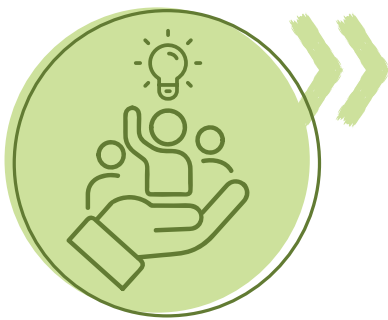


# 2025–2030 Strategic Plan

Stakeholders including students, staff, parents and community leaders shared their insights to develop a Strategic Plan reflective of key priorities in The Winnetka Public Schools community. The 2025-2030 Strategic Plan is a more simplified, targeted and dynamic plan to most effectively meet needs, respond to unforeseen challenges and allow District leadership to adapt to opportunities in real time.



**100**  
**YEARS**  
OF  
PROGRESSIVE  
EDUCATION



## Student Engagement & Motivation

Each student is empowered by a differentiated, creative, collaborative and student-centered environment guided by dedicated, passionate educators who promote excitement and real-world connections to learning.

### Each student will:

- » Feel cared for and supported by educators
- » Feel valued for their ideas and creativity
- » Understand and contribute to their goals in learning



## Culture & Well Being

Committed to creating a safe (physically, emotionally, intellectually, socially) and inclusive environment where students, staff and families celebrate accomplishments, prioritize safety and nurture a sense of belonging by supporting the growth of all.

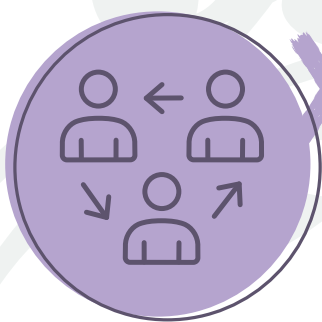
- » Intentional learning opportunities to support shared practices
- » Intentional and meaningful opportunities to celebrate success
- » Clear and consistent communication and implementation
- » Clear systemic expectations paired with necessary resources



## Staff Engagement & Growth

Highly skilled staff understands and embraces differentiated, experiential and meaningful learning to grow, collaborate, and impact students.

- » Hire, develop and retain staff who embody the competencies of the Portrait of an Educator.
- » Staff creates a space to allow students to develop the competencies of the Portrait of a Graduate
- » Staff are committed to the District's Tenets of Progressive Education
- » Staff feel supported in their ongoing professional learning and are provided with timely and relevant resources to improve and inspire their practices.
- » Staff balance qualitative and quantitative data to inform decision making.



## Community Connection & Partnership

Consistent and transparent communication between families and community members to build relationships and facilitate aligned values, positive culture and trust. This will foster student motivation, growth and achievement.

- » Actions are aligned with District values, mission and vision
- » Collaboration is a demonstrated commitment to the community
- » Engagement is timely and relevant
- » All recognize known channels of communication
- » Channels of communication are trusted and accountable resources to the community
- » All demonstrate active listening as a commitment to each other



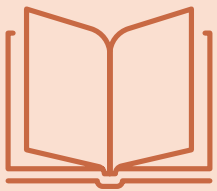
## Transparent Fiscal Stewardship & Facility Optimization

Commit to transparent, data-informed use of resources to support an innovative learning environment.

- » All students have access to accessible, welcoming learning spaces
- » Resource allocation aligns with district priorities for learning
- » Stakeholders feel informed and included in decision making processes
- » Learning spaces facilitate educational priorities
- » Financial data is clearly presented and easily understood by all

# 2025 BY-THE- NUMBERS

## INNOVATION, TEACHING & LEARNING



**84%**

of students in grades 3-8 performed at or above proficiency on spring 2025 state literacy testing



**81%**

of students in grades 3-8 performed at or above proficiency on spring 2025 state math testing



**3**

differentiated Kinetic Wellness courses offered for Washburne students

**23**

hours of staff professional learning dedicated to differentiated instruction

## HUMAN RESOURCES & PROFESSIONAL LEARNING



**67**

new staff members welcomed for the 25/26 school year



**10**

Winnetka Parent Institute (WPI) sessions offered in 25/26

**21**



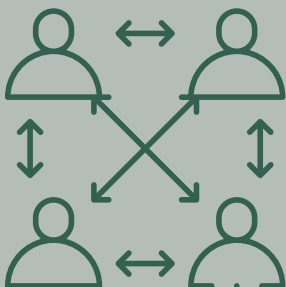
Professional Learning sessions tied to Strategic Plan offered at September 2025 Institute Day



**13**

Professional Learning opportunities for new Winnetka teachers during the 25/26 school year

## STUDENT SERVICES, EQUITY AND INCLUSION



**531**

hours of professional development were completed by members of the Department of Student Services, Equity and Inclusion team in summer 2025

**12**

sections of Kindergarten receive weekly integrated occupational therapy support to co-facilitate & co-implement universally designed environmental/instructional supports to benefit all learners

**83%**

of K-4 special education teachers fully trained in at least one research-based structured reading program (Wilson and/or SLANT)

## CONSTRUCTION

# 100%

Construction and Renovation Completed within 1% of Budget



**Total Budget: \$56,825,307**

Crow Island: **37.6%**  
 Skokie: **22.5%**  
 Washburne: **16.5%**  
 Hubbard Woods: **14.6%**  
 Security: **8.8%**



**Final Cost (Tracking within 1% of Budget)**

Crow Island: **38.3%**  
 Skokie: **21.9%**  
 Washburne: **15.6%**  
 Hubbard Woods: **14.8%**  
 Security: **9.4%**



## BUSINESS

Top rating of 'AAA' granted from Standard & Poor's Rating Services and 'Aaa' from Moody's Investors Service



The District continues to receive "Financial Recognition" status (the highest available) from the Illinois State Board of Education

**9<sup>th</sup>**  
YEAR  
IN A  
ROW

Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO) awarded the District a Certificate of Excellence in Financial Reporting for the fiscal year that ended June 30, 2024

## COMMUNICATIONS, SAFETY & SECURITY

# 75+

+ Over **200** building visits completed by Director of Safety & Security since August 2025

Winnetka staff members, Police & Fire Personnel participated in "I Love U Guys" Reunification Training in June 2025

+ 2nd annual Safety Month completed at 5 campuses in October 2025

# 8

Awards presented by National School Public Relations Association in summer 2025



# 8

Awards presented by the Illinois School Public Relations Association in Fall 2025. A total of **73** awards have been garnered since 2016, the highest in Illinois

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

# 500+

of community members celebrated newly unveiled renovations and improvements at **5 Open Houses** on September 20, 2025



Dr. Tess recognized for excellence as an Administrator at the 2025 Distinguished Service Celebration sponsored by the Illinois Chapter of the National School Public Relations Association (INSPPRA)

+ 4 Administrators presented best practices in communications, recruitment, safety & security at the July 2025 National School Public Relations Association Conference in Washington, D.C.

# 87

staff members honored via new "Painting Our Portrait" colleague recognition program

# 30

students and 5 staff sponsors participating in inaugural Student Ambassador Program, founded in partnership with National Junior Honor Society



# 30

+ Season 4 of "Winnetka Voices" premiered; over **30 episodes** produced in 3 years

# 336

students participated in enhanced Adventures in Learning program in summer 2025

+ New monthly newsletter launched, **36 Mix: 3-6 Things to Know about The Winnetka Public Schools**



# The Winnetka Public Schools’ First-Ever Student Ambassador Program Founded in 2025/2026

As a means to honor the student experience and elevate the critical importance of student voice and civic contribution, Dr. Tess introduced a Student Ambassador Program at the start of the 2025/2026 school year. Participation in the Student Ambassador Program involves simultaneous membership in a chapter of the National Junior Honor Society. Almost 30 students are involved in the program, which requires them to be a current 8th Grader attending Carleton Washburne School, attend monthly student meetings and complete a minimum of 10 service hours.

Dr. Tess led Washburne Student Ambassador and staff sponsors from each school on a service trip to Cradles to Crayons in Chicago in November 2025. The team sorted and quality-checked hundreds of donated items, ultimately helping support an estimated 260 children. The experience offered important reminders about generosity, dignity and the urgent needs of families across Chicago. The group’s next service trip will take place in January 2026.

“ Our students are eager to lead and understand the value of service to others. I’m immensely proud that this group of students is forming Winnetka’s first NJHS Chapter.

-Dr. Kelly Tess, Superintendent of Schools

| STRATEGIC PLAN - KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                               |                                  |                                  |                                  |                                  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <div>Student Engagement &amp; MotivationCulture &amp; Well BeingStaff Engagement &amp; GrowthCommunity Connection &amp; PartnershipTransparent Fiscal Stewardship &amp; Facility Optimization</div> |                                                                                               |                                  |                                  |                                  |                                  |
| KEY: Blue: Exceeding Goal, Green: On Track to Meet Goal, Yellow: Making Progress, Red: Lack of Progress                                                                                             |                                                                                               |                                  |                                  |                                  |                                  |
| STRATEGIC PILLAR                                                                                                                                                                                    | KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATOR                                                                     | QUARTER 1<br>Growth Status (NOV) | QUARTER 2<br>Growth Status (JAN) | QUARTER 3<br>Growth Status (MAR) | QUARTER 4<br>Growth Status (MAY) |
| Student Engagement & Motivation                                                                                                                                                                     | Student Chronic Absenteeism (more than 10% of the school year)                                | 6%                               |                                  |                                  |                                  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Percentage of K-8 Students Requiring Literacy Intervention                                    | 12%                              |                                  |                                  |                                  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Percentage of K-8 Students Requiring Math Intervention                                        | 7%                               |                                  |                                  |                                  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Delta from 80% proficiency in Reading                                                         | +4 (84%)                         |                                  |                                  |                                  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Delta from 80% proficiency in Math                                                            | 0 (80%)                          |                                  |                                  |                                  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Percentage of students meeting projected growth targets as reported by ECRA in Reading        | 87%                              |                                  |                                  |                                  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Percentage of students meeting projected growth targets as reported by ECRA in Math           | 84%                              |                                  |                                  |                                  |
| Culture & Well Being                                                                                                                                                                                | (Indicated by an asterisk in areas where culture and well being data is also being collected) | See Starred Indicators           |                                  |                                  |                                  |
| Staff Engagement & Growth                                                                                                                                                                           | Staff Retention (90% or more)*                                                                | 98.9%                            |                                  |                                  |                                  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Staff Attendance (Missing fewer than 10 school days)                                          | 99.7%                            |                                  |                                  |                                  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Staff Survey/Feedback Engagement*                                                             | 74%                              |                                  |                                  |                                  |
| Community Connection & Partnership                                                                                                                                                                  | Family Survey/Feedback Engagement*                                                            | LOW                              |                                  |                                  |                                  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Family Engagement with Digital Communications*                                                | HIGH                             |                                  |                                  |                                  |
| Transparent Fiscal Stewardship & Facility Optimization                                                                                                                                              | Fund Balance : Revenues                                                                       | 7.0:1                            |                                  |                                  |                                  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Expenditures: Revenues                                                                        | 5.4:1                            |                                  |                                  |                                  |

## KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The Board and administration identify and track Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to consistently report on important metrics reflecting on how the District is functioning as an organization. KPIs are not goals; instead, they are data points monitored regularly to give an indication of the District’s overall “health” and to highlight areas that may need more attention or resources. Reference this chart for quarterly updates on KPIs for the 2025–2026 school year.

## ATTENDANCE & ASSESSMENT MATTERS!

Missing a day of school here and there may seem insignificant, but absences add up!

### WHEN A STUDENT MISSES 2 DAYS A MONTH...

- » They will **miss 20 days** a year.
- » They will **miss 30 hours** of math over the school year.
- » They will **miss 60 hours** of reading and writing over the school year.
- » They will **miss over 1 year** of school by graduation.

### WHEN A STUDENT MISSES 4 DAYS A MONTH...

- » They will **miss 40 days** a year.
- » They will **miss 60 hours** of math over the school year.
- » They will **miss 120 hours** of reading and writing over the school year.
- » They will **miss over 2 years** of school by graduation.

*Lack of participation in state-mandated exams and District assessments decreases the ability to measure growth and impacts the way The Winnetka Public Schools are evaluated by the State of Illinois.*



## FULL DAY KINDERGARTEN Launching In Fall 2026

Beginning in 2026, The Winnetka Public Schools will offer full-day Kindergarten at Crow Island, Greeley and Hubbard Woods Schools. This change is in alignment with legislation from the State of Illinois. Additionally, extending our school day reflects the District's commitment to providing young learners with the time, support, and resources they need to grow socially, emotionally, and academically. Full-day Kindergarten will allow time for deeper learning, improved access to related arts, additional creative play, and foster continued meaningful connection with teachers and peers.

Registration for 2026/2027 is now open at [www.winnetka36.org](http://www.winnetka36.org). Further details about enrollment, schedules, and curriculum will be shared at our Incoming Kindergarten Family Information Night on January 21, 2026:

**Register for Kindergarten on-site: 4:30 - 6:00 p.m.**  
**Session with Administrators: 6:00 - 7:00 p.m.**

**Greeley School**  
**275 Fairview Ave., Winnetka**

RSVP



## Save the Dates for Summer 2026!

Get ready for an exciting summer filled with opportunities for growth and learning! We are thrilled to offer a dynamic range of programs for Adventures in Learning including Discover, Extended School Year and Academic Intervention Classes. These programs are designed to provide enriching educational experiences and support for students throughout the summer months.

**June 17—July 17, 2026** (no school June 19 & July 3).

Registration opens in March 2026.

# WINNETKA

## Our year in photos...



The annual Changemaker March at Greeley School.



Celebrating Washburne Class of 2025 graduates.



Students created poppies in honor of Veterans Day at Crow Island.



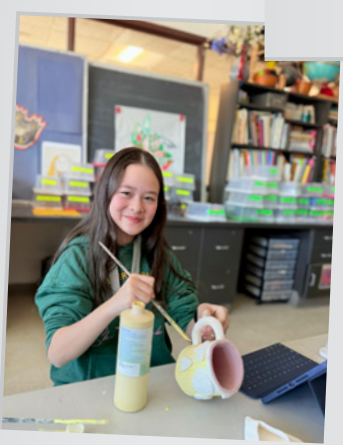
▲ Crow Island students performed with a Mariachi band thanks to a Winnetka Public Schools Foundation Artist-in-Residence Grant.



▲ Winnetka Police and Fire personnel and District leadership meet regularly for safety and security sessions.



▲ District administrators presented and received eight awards at the National School Public Relations Conference in Washington, D.C in July 2025



▲ A Crow Island student gets to explore a squad car during Safety Month.



1235 Oak Street  
Winnetka, IL 60093

PRESORTED  
FIRST CLASS  
U.S. POSTAGE

**PAID**  
PERMIT #12  
WINNETKA, IL

Follow us on Social Media!  
#youbelonghere



@winnetkapublicschools



**LISTEN TO THE  
"WINNETKA VOICES"  
PODCAST HERE!**



New episode featuring  
NTHS Superintendent,  
Dr. Peter Tragos, out now!

  
**OVER 100 YEARS**  
of Public Progressive Education  
A WHOLE CHILD APPROACH  
EXPERIENTIAL & MEANINGFUL LEARNING  
COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITY



Produced by Dr. Kelly Tess,  
Superintendent of Schools, in partnership  
with the Central Office Team

Edited and Photographed by Katharine  
Hughes, Director of Communications



▲ Thank you, Winnetka Public Schools  
Foundation, for helping fund Lion  
Lattes for our Skokie students!