



SEARS

Community

Kenilworth School District 38 - Quarterly Newsletter

WINTER 2026



UPCOMING DATES

Mark your calendar with these upcoming important dates.

- FEBRUARY 23**
Board of Education Regular Meeting
7:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.
- FEBRUARY 23 - 27**
Administration Appreciation Week
- FEBRUARY 26**
JK Parent Teacher Conferences
(No School for JK)
- FEBRUARY 27**
K-8 Parent Teacher Conferences
(No School)
- MARCH 9**
IAR Testing
- MARCH 12**
Board of Education Building and Finance Committee Meeting
8:30 a.m. - 9:30 a.m.
- MARCH 30 - APRIL 3**
Spring Break
(No School)

VISIT THE WEBSITE

www.kenilworth38.org

Sears Earns Exemplary Designation on Illinois School Report Card

On October 30, 2025, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) released the annual Illinois Report Card, which provides a comprehensive overview of school performance across multiple educational indicators and assigns each school a summative designation as part of the state's accountability system.

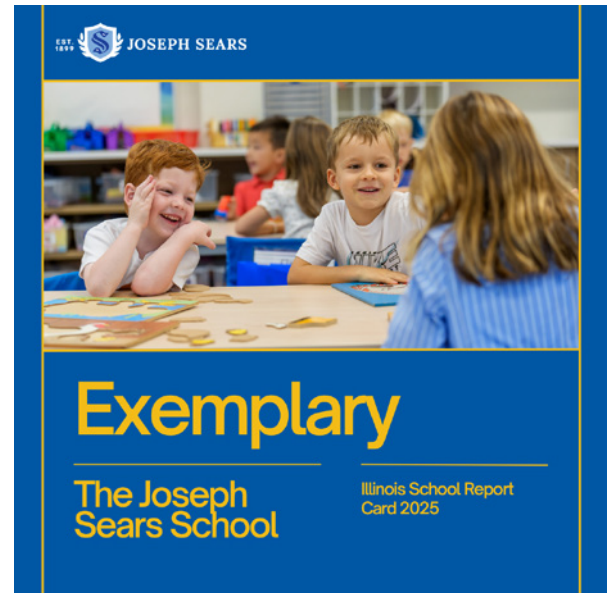
We are proud to share that The Joseph Sears School has earned an Exemplary designation, the highest distinction awarded by ISBE. This places our school among the top 10 percent of schools statewide, recognizing our high achievement, strong growth, low absenteeism, the absence of any underperforming student groups, and high participation in our annual parent, student, and staff survey. This accomplishment reflects the dedication of our students, the commitment of our educators, and the partnership of our families. It stands as a testament to our collective pursuit of excellence and continuous improvement in every area of student learning and well-being.

Academic Performance

In both English Language Arts (ELA) and Math, our students again earned all available points for academic proficiency, maintaining the high achievement levels we have come to expect. Over the past year, we have also continued our efforts to improve academic growth, and the results have been outstanding.

- ELA:** Student growth increased from the 54.4th percentile to the 61.2nd percentile.
- Math:** Student growth increased from the 48.5th percentile to the 61.5th percentile.

Both results exceed our 2022-2027 Strategic Plan goal of achieving student growth rates of at least



60 percent. As families may recall, the District has spent a significant amount of time and energy over the last few years reviewing and updating our curriculum in both core subjects and special offerings. The gains we have seen in student growth are the direct result of this updated curriculum and our focus on professional development designed to meet each student's unique learning needs.

Attendance and Engagement

We are equally proud of our continued progress in student attendance. Chronic absenteeism decreased from 5.7 percent last year to 3.8 percent this year, well below our Strategic Plan target of keeping chronic absenteeism under 10 percent. This improvement reflects the hard work of our attendance committee, the dedication of our families, and the positive outcomes of our Culture of Care initiative, which ensures every student feels welcome, engaged, and ready to learn.

Our results from the Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI) Survey, completed by students, staff, and families, align with this trend. The findings from this survey affirm that our efforts

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Science Pilots Ignite Inquiry at The Joseph Sears School

Over the last five years, the District has worked to evaluate and update the curriculum taught in almost every area of the school. This year, The Joseph Sears School is reviewing and updating the science curriculum used in both elementary and junior high classrooms. Students in grades K-5 are piloting programs from SEPUP and OpenSciEd, while students in grade 6 are piloting materials from Smithsonian Science and OpenSciEd. These pilots reflect the school's commitment to strengthening the inquiry-based learning it offers students and to developing the fearless learners and creative thinkers described in the *Portrait of a Sears Graduate*.

The pilot programs were selected last summer after members of the faculty and administration engaged in professional development regarding the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), completed in partnership with facilitators from Loyola University. Each pilot was intentionally chosen to align with NGSS, the *Portrait of a Sears Graduate*, and the school's broader curriculum framework. All of the programs selected offer important benefits for the District's students:

Learning Through Inquiry

First, each pilot chosen by the selection committee engages students in real-world phenomena and meaningful problems. Students ask questions, test ideas, and construct explanations using evidence, placing their reasoning at the center of the learning process. This approach promotes deeper understanding and student ownership of learning. "Through hands-on investigations, student-led discussions, and real-world problem solving, students are encouraged to take risks, persevere, and build confidence in their thinking," explained Mrs. Vicky

Morris, 6th- and 7th-grade science teacher and Science Curriculum Leader.

Coherent Learning from K-8

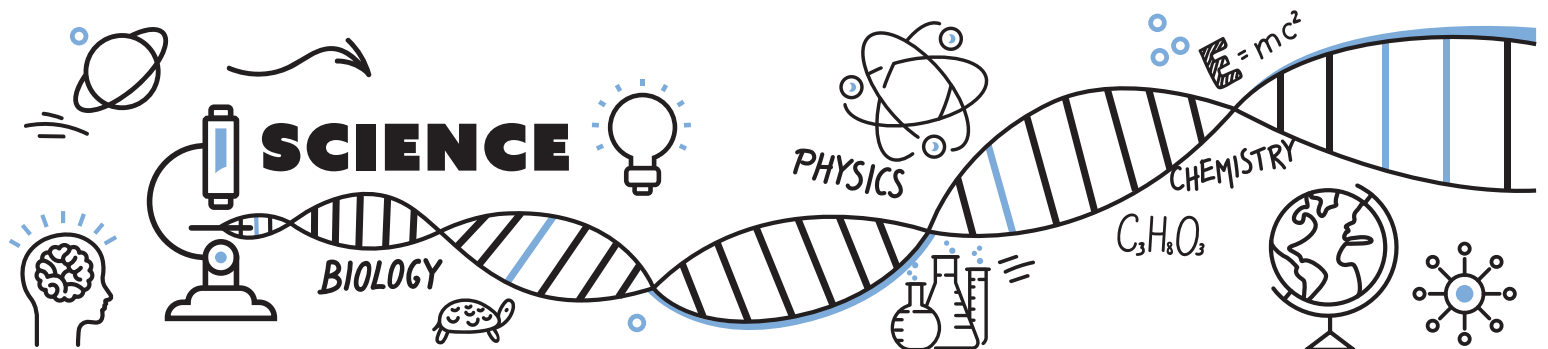
Next, pilot units were intentionally selected to ensure a clear and developmentally appropriate progression of science concepts across grade levels. As students move through the grades, they build from foundational sensemaking to more advanced skills such as modeling, data analysis, and scientific explanation.

Access for All Learners

Finally, the piloted curriculum was selected to foster strong engagement for students who have a range of learning needs. Hands-on investigations, modeling, and collaborative sensemaking provide multiple entry points that allow all students to participate meaningfully in rigorous science learning.

Looking Ahead

Throughout the pilot process, teachers will participate in curriculum-specific training provided by each partner and meet regularly to reflect on instruction, analyze student work, and share feedback. These collaborative structures will support thoughtful implementation and consistent expectations across classrooms. Eventually, teachers will review common assessment data, survey feedback, and student work to determine which curriculum best supports student engagement and learning. The science committee will recommend selected programs to the Board of Education in May, with full implementation planned for Fall 2026.



to build a welcoming and inclusive environment are making a measurable difference, and we remain committed to strengthening this work in the years to come.

Sustaining Excellence:

The Road Ahead

Earning an Exemplary designation is a proud milestone, but it is not our destination. Guided by our 2022–2027 Strategic Plan and the *Portrait of a Sears Graduate*, the District will continue to focus on both academic excellence and the development of the whole child. Our efforts will focus on sustaining and expanding the practices that led to our success through curriculum alignment, collaboration, and innovative teaching and learning approaches.

As we move toward a curriculum that is fully aligned with state standards, our staff will continue to collaborate through Tuesday In-Service sessions and engage in professional learning and curriculum analysis to ensure each student's academic needs are met. Our Curriculum Committees will also play an important role in identifying and implementing programming adjustments that support mastery of state standards in the year ahead.

In addition to measuring school success through the Illinois Report Card, the District uses a Strategic Plan to guide its goals and measure progress across all dimensions of the *Portrait of a Sears Graduate*. You can view the current Strategic Plan, along with its key performance indicators, on our website. The District is also looking forward to developing the next strategic plan to guide its work in the future. To learn more about the planning process and vision guiding this work, please view the Strategic Plan Overview Video on our website.

Thank you for being an active partner in shaping the future of The Joseph Sears School. Together, we can build a plan that honors our traditions while advancing our shared vision for excellence.

Kenilworth School District 38 Earns LEED Certification

Kenilworth School District 38 is proud to announce that The Joseph Sears School has officially earned LEED certification, a major sustainability milestone and accomplishment of the District's Master Facilities Plan (MFP).

LEED, short for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, is a globally recognized green building certification program developed by the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC). Projects seeking certification must meet a list of mandatory prerequisites and then earn additional credits across various categories. These categories encompass a wide range of sustainability criteria, including energy performance, water use, materials, innovation, and indoor environmental quality. According to the USGBC, there were over 195,000 LEED-certified buildings in 185 countries worldwide as of late 2024.

Where District 38 Excelled

In the LEED evaluation, our District earned top marks in the following categories:

Indoor Environmental Quality

- The District earned LEED points for Indoor Environmental Quality by creating a healthy and comfortable environment for occupants while they are inside. This means bringing in clean air, using environmentally conscious materials, allowing in daylight and outdoor views, maintaining comfortable noise and temperature levels, and ensuring the air remains clean during and after construction.

Energy Performance

- The District earned LEED points for Energy and Atmosphere by using less energy and relying on cleaner, more efficient systems. This includes designing efficient heating, cooling, and lighting systems, utilizing renewable energy when possible, managing refrigerants responsibly, and demonstrating the building's actual performance through testing and monitoring.

Innovation

- The District earned Innovation points by going beyond standard green practices and creating programs that support community, wellness, and the environment. This included adding a community mural, creating restorative spaces, increasing connection to nature, providing all-gender single-user restrooms, and managing rainwater at an exemplary level.

A Community Project

Achieving LEED certification required years of thoughtful planning, careful renovations, and a District-wide effort to incorporate sustainable practices into both daily operations and long-term facility improvements. The District would like to extend its appreciation to the members of the MFP Sustainability Committee, who provided guidance to the school before and during the renovation process. Their dedication and advocacy were essential to achieving this certification. Students also played a role in championing sustainable practices through clubs like Planet Panther, curriculum integration in classes such as the 7th Grade Project Lead the Way class, Energy and the Environment, and school-wide sustainability advocacy. As the District looks ahead, the LEED certification reinforces its ongoing commitment to providing sustainable facilities that offer comfortable spaces for students to learn and align with the values of the Kenilworth community.

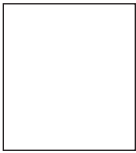




The Joseph Sears School

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KENILWORTH BOARD OF EDUCATION

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- Ms. Kate Donegan, Superintendent
- Mr. Nathan McBride, Chief Operating Officer/CSBO
- Dr. Carrie De La Cruz, Director of Student Services
- Dr. Stephanie Helfand, Principal
- Mr. Geoffrey Perlman, JK-4 Assistant Principal
- Mr. Jeff Rosen, 5-8 Assistant Principal



2025 SEARS BY THE NUMBERS

1/3

STAKEHOLDER PARTNERSHIPS

1/3 Sears Students are enrolled in an after-school program



STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND RETENTION

137.5

guaranteed professional development hours per year

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

INCREASED BY

15.75

Increased our Illinois School Report Card Score by 15.75 points since 2022, from 68.85 to 84.6, from Commendable to Exemplary



FISCAL ALIGNMENT

100%

of all District Funds are tied to a pillar of the Strategic Plan.

WHOLE CHILD

Our faculty Whole Child Committee has met 6 times so far this school year to develop programming for Compassionate Citizen Week, review student behavior progress and areas of growth, and plan two staff professional development sessions, which have been delivered at Tuesday teacher in-services.



88 ROOMS

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

New furniture adoption in 88 rooms.