



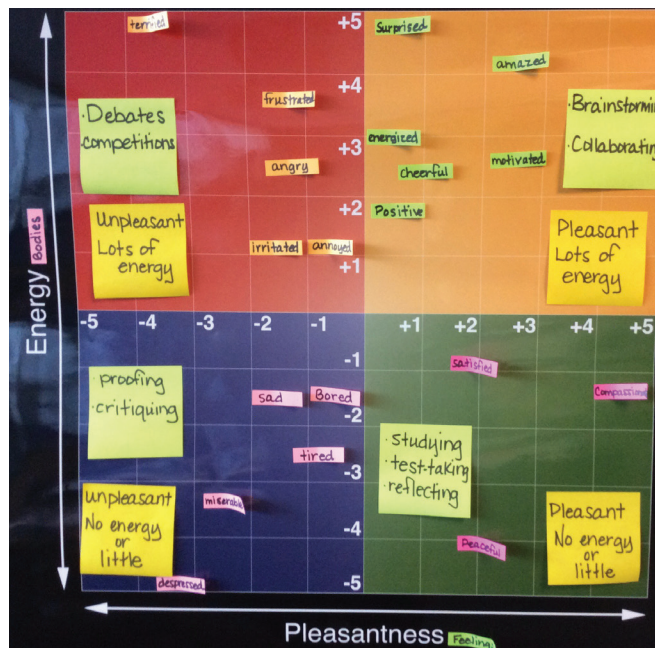
RULER helps guide students' behavior

Suppose an elementary student whose first language was not English uttered a racially charged word in the classroom without fully understanding the meaning. Other students took offense and responded by trying to hit him. If you were the classroom teacher, what would you do?

In a similar incident in District 68, a teacher used RULER to help her students confront their feelings about what had happened and rebuild a sense of community in the classroom.

RULER is an approach to social-emotional learning that District 68 has phased in over the last two years. The program teaches the skills of Recognizing, Understanding, Labeling, Expressing and Regulating emotion.

As Noah, a fourth-grader at Highland School, explained, "RULER helps us grow our emotional intelligence by naming our emotions and expressing



A "mood meter" allows students to describe their emotions.

them in a healthy way so we can stay safe and be sure others are also safe."

One RULER tool is the "meta-moment," which gives students a way to step back from a difficult situation if they are upset or angry — literally to picture their "best selves" and remember how they aspire to act. A Highland second-grader described it this way: "It helps us calm down and relax so we can make a good choice."

Another tool is the "mood meter" — a way for students to map emotions on a graph, where the X axis indicates degrees of pleasantness/unpleasantness and the Y axis indicates positive or negative energy.

Kim Weissenberg, a social worker at Highland who also works with students at the Early Childhood Center, said even young students use the tool. The

second-grader said, "The mood meter helps us to learn about our feelings. It shows us what our expressions are."

In the incident just described, the teacher used the mood meter to let students process how they felt hearing such a word in their classroom, how it felt to have a violent reaction or to be on the receiving end of one, and how it felt to be part of a classroom community where good kids got involved in an unpleasant situation.

With RULER, students create their own class charter to lay out how they want to be treated and treat each other. They establish

goals and hold each other accountable for creating the climate they envision.

Fifth-grade students Ella and David noted that their class charter lists five qualities students want to foster at school — to be welcoming, trusting, safe, cared for and comforting. They agree that RULER techniques have helped reduce emotional displays at school. "People don't have such super-strong emotions," Ella said. "Last year we had a lot of that."

A fourth-grader named Maria said her classroom's charter "reminds us that our words and actions affect others and have consequences."

In the incident described above, the teacher cited the charter to remind her students of the plan they had made for dealing with unexpected or stressful

—Continued on page 2

In this issue...

The beat goes on at Stenson—page 2
Leadership realigned for 2019-20—page 2

Devonshire students team with high schoolers—page 3

District 68 Notes—page 3

Letter from the Superintendent—page 4



Music teacher Chris Neal rehearses with the Stenson percussion ensemble.

The beat goes on at Stenson

Chris Neal has come up with an offbeat idea for getting students involved in music. In his first year as music teacher at Jane Stenson School, he has launched a percussion ensemble for a growing group of fourth- and fifth-grade students.

While he may be new to the teaching profession, Mr. Neal is a seasoned professional musician. A multi-instrumentalist, he started playing piano at age 5 and has degrees in jazz studies and classical vocal music. These days, his primary instrument is the saxophone. He has appeared with Buddy Guy, the Temptations, Donald Byrd, the Joffrey Ballet and many others, in the

U.S. and abroad.

In starting the group, he said, “I had a choice to start a new performing ensemble and I felt kids would really enjoy using their hands to make cool beats.”

According to Stenson principal Sue O’Neil, “The percussion ensemble ties in with the cultural diversity at our school. However different they might be, every culture has drums.”

“It also ties in with our strategic plan goals of student engagement and integration of world cultures,” said Supt. James Garwood.

The students are learning to play a variety of percussion instruments, ranging from familiar ones such as tambourines, maracas and bells, to West African drums called djembes and a box-shaped instrument from Peru called a cajón. “And of course, we have our hands,” Mr. Neal said.

The ensemble practices once a week during recess and puts on two performances per year. Besides showing students how to play the instruments, Mr. Neal teaches them about their history and cultural significance.

“The students really seem to enjoy themselves and look forward to rehearsing,” Mr. Neal said, “We have a lot of fun and we challenge ourselves at the same time.”

Leadership realigned for 2019-20

With Susan O’Neil retiring as principal of Jane Stenson School in June, three administrators will move into new positions for the 2019-2020 school year.

Robyn Huemmer, currently principal of Old Orchard Junior High, will become principal at Stenson. Greg Hanson will take over as principal at OOJH after serving as assistant principal since 2015. Alison Jenski will move from dean of students at OOJH to assistant principal. The dean of students position will be eliminated and replaced by a second A.P. position. Christopher Robinson, a district newcomer, has been hired for that spot.

Next year will also see the addition of a new administrative position: coordinator of curriculum and school improvement. The District 68 school board voted to hire Brian Ritz for the position at its February meeting.

RULER

—Continued from page 1

situations. “The teacher was able to use the tools of RULER to help rebuild a functioning classroom community,” said Highland principal Karen Bradley.

District 68 began training staff to use RULER in 2017, and rolled out the program in classrooms this year.

According to Director of Special Services Peg Lasiewicki, “Students learn best when they develop the social-emotional skills that revolve around empathy, emotion management and social problem-solving.”

Dr. Bradley said students seem to find the RULER approach user-friendly. “Having co-created the classroom charter which describes how they want to feel as a community, they can evaluate their own actions against the standard of whether they are contributing to a positive classroom environment or taking away from it. They are able to use the mood meter to talk about their feelings.”

HIGHLIGHTS is a community newsletter published three times a year by Skokie School District 68.

District 68 Board of Education

Una McGeough, President
 Dr. Amy Anson, Vice President
 Dr. Richard Berk, Secretary
 Frank Alkyer
 Dr. Katrina Bell-Jordan
 Meghan Espnoza
 Joseph Ruffner

Dr. James Garwood, Superintendent
 Board of Education meetings are held at 7 p.m. on the third Thursday of each month in the Educational Service Center at 9440 Kenton Ave. All are invited to attend.

HIGHLIGHTS is written and produced by Complete Communications, Inc. Skokie, IL.

Devonshire students team with high schoolers

Devonshire School has partnered with Niles North High School to bring high school students in to mentor younger students.

They get together once a month, with activities focused on relationship-building, teamwork, perseverance and responding to setbacks. The students follow up after the meetings with weekly communications such as written letters, Seesaw posts and attending a sporting event.

Eighteen Devonshire students from third, fourth and fifth grade are taking part in the program in its first year. Teachers recommended students who might benefit from mentoring and then a team made the final decisions based on academic, social-emotional and goal-setting data, according to Devonshire Principal Hal Schmeisser.

Student interests such as sports, hobbies, struggles and personal experiences were taken into account. Many of the Devonshire students come from the school's Athletic Leadership Council, while the high school students are all varsity athletes. "We tried to match each of our students with a similar Niles North student," Mr. Schmeisser said. "We want to create an opportunity for all of these students to learn and grow."

The groups meet once a month. The first meeting in January, coordinated by fourth-grade teacher Anna Goepfing, included some high-energy team-building chal-



Devonshire students and their mentors from Niles North High School engage in a group activity.

lenges and gave students a chance to get acquainted.

The focus in February was sportsmanship, with each mentor choosing activities designed to promote discussion, honesty and collaboration.

"We are beyond excited to partner with Niles North High School to provide positive peer relationships and mentoring for our aspiring student athletes," Mr. Schmeisser said.

District 68 Notes

Stenson students create video to promote food pantry

A group of fourth and fifth graders at Jane Stenson School recently created a public service announcement (PSA) for the Niles Township Food Pantry. In the process they learned about scripting and producing a video message as well as helping to address a community need.

The students heard about the food pantry's pressing need for donations from Bonnie Ognisanti, a Stenson parent who is a Niles Township trustee. Introduced to the concept of the PSA, the students decided to create one of their own. They skyped with local CBS television reporter Charlie De Mar, who took them through the process of reporting a story. They then visited the food pantry to interview manager Tony Araque and take photos and videos.

The students came up with a story board along with a catch phrase: "Even a little can do a lot." The resulting PSA was used to kick off a combination food drive and loose-change drive in all District 68 schools, and was shared with other schools in Niles Township.

The students' finished video can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gQEz9eYLpuA>.

Highland School observes Heritage Day

Highland School celebrated its annual Heritage Day on Feb. 23. Organized by the Highland PTA, the event represents a collaboration between parents and teachers.

Carrie Rodas, the mother of two students, solicited families to prepare displays highlighting aspects of their culture. She matched families so those from the same culture could work together. The result: 27 displays of information, artifacts, clothing and food from all over the world.

Many children dressed in traditional garb and several performed. A fourth-grader and mother demonstrated a Bulgarian dance while a third-grader and her parents showed off their footwork in traditional Jewish dances. Four students from Tibet played traditional instruments and sang. A second-grader recited a Ukrainian poem and a group from Korea performed the "Baby Shark" song.

HIGHLIGHTS

Skokie School District 68
Skokie, Illinois 60076
Telephone: 847-676-9000
Fax: 847-676-9232
www.Skokie68.org

NON PROFIT
ORG.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Skokie, Illinois
Permit No. 55

ECRWSS POSTAL CUSTOMER



Letter from the Superintendent

Dear Community Members,

Last year, District 68 rewrote our strategic plan over a months-long process that involved a diverse group of stakeholders in a retreat, surveys in multiple languages, follow-up work done by administrators and discussions at several board meetings. So what happens to strategic plans after they are created? Do they lie forgotten on a dusty shelf or in a file cabinet? I just checked and could not find ours there!

While the document exists on our website, on my computer, on my desk and in the meetings of our leadership team, the best place to see District 68's strategic plan is in our schools. In this winter edition of Highlights you can find just a few excellent examples of how we have taken the core values and goals that came out of our community engagement effort and turned them into a reality for our students, parents, and staff.

Our overarching goal is to focus on developing the whole child. Our new social-emotional curriculum, RULER, was chosen to empower students to make healthy and positive choices, self-advocate and navigate the increasingly complex world of emotions. Kids and adults all live in a world where emotional responses can enable or derail learning. By focusing on a core set of tools and experiences designed to help students process emotions in positive and productive ways, we expect to help them learn and grow. Walk through any of our schools or and you'll discover abundant evidence that we are making a difference.

District 68 is also continuing to creatively support the

arts, an area that parents have told us is of great interest. The percussion ensemble at Jane Stenson School is a fine example, interweaving several strategic plan goals to create an engaging musical experience for students. Additionally, in early March, OOJH held their annual band and orchestra concerts in partnership with the Chicago Philharmonic, an experience that few children anywhere can claim.

At Devonshire School, a new mentoring program connects elementary students with Niles North High School to build relationships and provide positive role models. At Stenson, students learned how to create a video public service announcement to promote the Niles Township Food Pantry, supporting the core value of social responsibility and providing an innovative way of addressing the goal of teaching and learning. Highland School's Heritage Day embodies an important aspect of Skokie 68's identity and the strategic plan by honoring our diversity.

In addition to these examples, the district has adopted a new approach to support academics using the SMART school improvement process from the Consortium for Educational Change. And we have contracted an outside audit of our communications to proactively seek out opportunities for improvement. Later this spring, you will be asked to participate in that audit when we solicit your input on how we communicate.

While this is by no means a comprehensive accounting of how the strategic plan is guiding our work, I hope it provides you with a sampling of the care District 68 is exercising to make our plan come alive for our students. Our strategic plan overview is available at <https://bit.ly/2HGbhJR>

Sincerely,
James E. Garwood, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools

Our mission is to develop children who are confident and creative learners. We provide a rigorous curriculum and a supportive school environment that promotes high achievement, encourages personal growth, and meets the unique needs of each child.