



## New strategic plan effort kicks off

**D**istrict 68 has begun to develop a new five-year strategic plan, and all stakeholders are encouraged to participate.

The school board is seeking ideas from parents, staff, community members and, for the first time, junior-high students. "Our purpose is to gather input from a representative group of people about what they think our goals and direction should be for the next five years," said Supt. James Garwood.

Board President Una McGeough, who worked on the last strategic plan five years ago, said, "As a public school district, part of our role is to ensure that we reflect community priorities, while also meeting state and federal statutory requirements and adhering to excellent educational practices."

The board has emphasized community involvement in its discussions with the superintendent. The board also identified areas for consideration, such as early childhood education efforts, student achievement across different groups, and equity.

The district has been recruiting people to serve on a planning com-

mittee. Emails went out in September to parents and other community members asking them to apply.

Every school in District 68 will be represented on the committee, as will student subgroups such as English learners and special education students. Teachers, classified staff members, administrators and board members will be included along with parents, business owners and members of the community at large. Representatives from the Village of Skokie, the Skokie Public Library and the Niles Township District for Special Education (NTDSE) also will be involved. About 50 people will serve and take part in a full-day focus group session on Oct. 28.

"They will give us areas to explore, which we will then research and discuss at the administrative level and board level before any decision-making takes place," Dr. Garwood said. "They have a vested interest in an excellent school system, so it's up to us to listen to the people we serve."

At the Oct. 28 meeting, committee members will discuss their ideas and review results of an online survey that opened on Oct. 2 at the district website ([www.skokie68.org/about/survey](http://www.skokie68.org/about/survey)).

All residents of the district are encouraged to take the survey. Respondents can choose from six languages: English, Spanish, Urdu, Syrian, Tagalog and Arabic. For convenience, parents can take the survey at special kiosks set up in their children's schools during

parent-teacher conferences in October.

District 68 has hired Jeffery Cohn of Brave Dialogue to serve as a facilitator during the strategic planning process. An organizational consultant, he has helped Niles District 71 and NTDSE with their recent strategic plans.

"I was part of that NTDSE process last spring and I was happy with his approach. I looked at eight or nine possibilities and I like his style best of all for our district," Supt. Garwood said.

After the Oct. 28 meeting, Mr. Cohn will meet with Dr. Garwood and other administrators to draft the strategic plan, which will then be shared with the steering committee. The final plan will be submitted to the school board for a vote in December or January.

### ***Substitute teachers needed***

District 68 is looking for qualified substitute teachers. Substitutes are paid \$110 per day and work in a collaborative, supportive environment.

Candidates must have at least a bachelor's degree and a current license from the Illinois State Board of Education. License information is available at [www.isbe.net/Pages/Educator-Licensure.aspx](http://www.isbe.net/Pages/Educator-Licensure.aspx).

Applicants can apply online by clicking on the Employment link at the top right at [www.skokie68.org](http://www.skokie68.org). Qualified candidates will be contacted for an interview.

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# Welcome, new staff members

**Ferial Atto** is a new EL teacher at Old Orchard Junior High. She was a reading and EL teacher in Chicago Public Schools. She received her bachelor's degree in elementary education from Northeastern Illinois University, and completed her master's degree as a reading specialist at Concordia University.

**Jelica Barjaktarevic** is a new EL teacher at Jane Stenson School. She has served as a teaching assistant at Old Orchard and filled in as an EL teacher. She has a bachelor's in elementary education from Carroll College in Wisconsin and a master's in English language teaching and learning from Loyola University.

**Anna Goepfinger** is a new 2nd grade teacher at Devonshire School. She taught kindergarten in East Maine School District 63. An alumna of District 68, she has a bachelor's in educational studies from Denison University and a master's in elementary education from National Louis University.

**Kristen Hoch** is the math specialist at Highland School. She taught second grade in Glenview School District 34. She has bachelor's degrees in early childhood education and mathematics and a master's in curriculum and instruction from the University of Illinois.

**Alison Jenski** is the new dean of students at Old Orchard. She worked in Evanston/Skokie District 65 where she was a social studies teacher and department chair. She received a bachelor's in social science/history with a minor in secondary education from the University of Illinois and a master's in educational leadership from Concordia University.

**Jordan Katz** is the new special education teacher at Highland. He taught 4th and 5th grade special education in the Los Angeles Unified School District. He has a bachelor's in general studies from Indiana University and a master's in elementary education/special education from Mount Saint Mary's College.

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 of Schools

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. You are invited to attend.

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



Staff shown (from left): Karen Kim, Sarah Ostrowski, Julie McCormack, Anna Goepfinger, Marti Miller, Jordan Katz, Caryn Stern, Liz Piper, Alexa Pascarella, Alexandra Needle, Christina Mazza, Kristen Hoch, Jelica Barjaktarevic, Diego Marin, Elaine Rouch, Isabel Lopez, Ferial Atto, Jamie Michelle Tunquist. Not pictured: Alison Jenski.

**Karen Kim** is the new EL teacher at Devonshire. She taught 4th grade for 11 years in Barrington District 220. She received a bachelor's in elementary education and history from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and a master's degree in curriculum and instruction from National Louis University. She also has an EL endorsement from the Illinois Resource Center.

**Isabel Lopez** is the new Spanish teacher at Old Orchard. She taught high school Spanish for 11 years and served as a long-term substitute. She attended both Illinois State University and the University of Illinois while earning a bachelor's in Spanish secondary education. She has a master's in curriculum and instruction from Olivet Nazarene University.

**Diego Marin** is a new math teacher at Old Orchard. A first-year teacher and alumnus of District 68, he earned his bachelor's degree from Northeastern Illinois University in mathematics and secondary education.

**Christina Mazza** is a new math teacher at Old Orchard. She comes from Gurnee School District 56. She has a bachelor's in elementary education with a math endorsement from Augustana College and a master's in curriculum and instruction from the American College of Education in Indianapolis.

**Julie McCormack** is the new math specialist at Devonshire. She comes from Kildeer District 96. She has a bachelor's in elementary education from DePauw University in Indiana and a master's from National Louis University in math education.

**Marti Miller** is a new 1st grade teacher at Highland. She taught kindergarten in Pennoyer District 79 for six years. She received a bachelor's from the University of Iowa in elementary education and a master's degree as a reading specialist from Olivet Nazarene University.

**Alexandra Needle** is the new reading specialist at Highland. She worked in Lexington Public Schools in Massachusetts. She earned

a bachelor's in English from the University of Pennsylvania and has master's degrees from Harvard University in language and literacy.

**Sarah Ostrowski** is the new math specialist at Jane Stenson. She was an elementary instructional coach in Adams County School District 14 in Colorado. She has a bachelor's from Indiana's DePauw University in elementary education and a master's in school leadership from Concordia University.

**Alexa Pascarella** is a new 4th grade teacher at Highland. She taught kindergarten and 3rd grade in Manhattan, Ill., School District 114. She has a bachelor's in elementary education from Lewis University.

**Elizabeth Piper** is the new speech and language pathologist for the Early Childhood Center. She worked in Wheeling District 21 for 13 years. She has bachelor's degrees from Truman University in communications and from Elmhurst University in communication disorders. She received her speech-language master's from Rush University.

**Elaine Rouch** is the new reading specialist at Jane Stenson. She was a reading specialist at Erie Elementary Charter School in Chicago. She has a bachelor's in psychology from DePaul University and a master's in reading from Northeastern University.

**Caryn Stern** is a new 1st grade teacher at Highland. She has taught preschool, kindergarten and 5th grade. She has a bachelor's in English from Boston University and a master's degree from DePaul in elementary education and as a reading specialist.

**Jamie Michelle Tunquist** will be the drama teacher at Old Orchard in 2017-18, filling a one-year leave. She taught drama in Morgan County School District in Utah for two years. She received her bachelor's degree from Brigham Young University in theatre arts education. She also has a master's from Illinois Benedictine University in reading and literacy.

# New member added to school board

**T**he District 68 board welcomes Meghan Espinoza as its newest member.

She was chosen to fill the term of Menucha Levy, who resigned from the school board, and sworn in at the July 20 board meeting. Her term will expire in 2019. "I have always been interested in serving my community, and education is very important to me. I have already taken on many different roles in the district and this was another great opportunity to serve," she said.

Ms. Espinoza is a 6th grade English language arts teacher at Highcrest Middle School in Wilmette. She and her husband have lived in District 68 for 14 years. They have three children, two of whom attend district schools while the third



Meghan Espinoza

is a student at Niles North High School.

Ms. Espinoza has been highly involved in district activities for years. She has been PTA secretary, vice president and president at Devonshire School and PTA president at Old Orchard Junior High. She has also served as a parent representative and chair of the School Board Nominating Committee, and as a parent representative for the last district strategic plan process and the junior high grading learning team.

She sees student achievement and school funding as perennial issues facing District 68 and other districts.

On the first issue, Ms. Espinoza said, "District 68 is well equipped to meet the challenge of student achievement. The district employs the best staff in the area. Their hard work and dedication have always been an asset to the district. The TLI68 implementation has also been instrumental in differentiating curriculum to best meet the needs of all students."

Regarding school funding, she said, "Having a school board that is as fiscally responsible as the District 68 board is especially important when it is uncertain how much funding we will receive from the state."

## Nelson to direct operations

**D**istrict 68 has hired Ernie Nelson to be Director of Operations. "My goal is to develop and maintain a professional custodial maintenance program that serves the best interests of the students and staff in District 68," Mr. Nelson said.

"I look forward — as my entire staff does — to working closely with the entire team of teachers, administrators and support staff. I can see already that the people in this district appreciate that clean, well-maintained buildings and other facilities benefit everyone who comes into our schools."



Ernie Nelson

As the former Building and Grounds director moved on last year and the current head of transportation is retiring at the end of the 2017-2018 school year, the administration decided to combine them.

Mr. Nelson has plenty of experience wearing both hats. He worked in Genoa-Kingston District 424 in DeKalb County and Burlington Central District 301 in Kane County. Most recently, he was Superintendent of Parks and Facilities for the City of Woodstock.

"I'm happy to be back in a school environment — especially this one. The District 68 administration is the most supportive in my experience," he said. "I've joined a great team."

Mr. Nelson is a hands-on administrator who is willing to pitch in with the custodial crew on a maintenance project or jump behind the wheel of a bus. That can be important for a district like District 68, which owns and operates its own buses. "The transportation service we are able to provide is far superior to a contract service," said Supt. James Garwood.

Mr. Nelson said, "I know first impressions are important, and there is a general perception that if a school looks good, it is good."

## Principal earns state honor

**S**ue O'Neil, principal of Jane Stenson School, has received an Award of Merit from the Illinois State Board of Education as part of the Those Who Excel education awards program. She is the first District 68 teacher or administrator to be honored in this way.



Sue O'Neil

"Being selected for this award is both exciting and humbling," Mrs.

O'Neil said. "I am genuinely touched that others appreciate my work to the extent that they would nominate me for this award.

"At the same time, I am only successful as an educator if there is collaboration among everyone involved. I have felt successful because of the outstanding professionals I work with and my strong school community of dedicated parents and students. Everything we do for the students is a joint effort. In this respect, the award isn't solely mine. Rather, it is shared."

Mrs. O'Neil will receive the award at the Those Who Excel honors banquet in Normal, Ill., on Oct 28.

## HIGHLIGHTS

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## Letter from the Superintendent

Dear Community Members,

**C**ontinuous improvement in education is founded on the belief that excellence is not a destination but rather a commitment to continue the journey towards excellence. The most obvious service that a school district

provides is a high-quality education for all students. But there is more. A quality school district also supports its families and contributes to the health and financial stability of its community. It is well known that most home buyers with children consider the quality and reputation of the local district. A reputation for high quality makes homes in that community more desirable and elevates home values.

What qualities contribute to a great school district? In addition to having a high-quality staff, a great school district continually strives to improve. A school district should not believe that it is the best, because doing so signals an end to yearning for something even better. While we have many things to be proud of, we are engaged in many improvement initiatives to ensure that our boys and girls get the best education possible. As we prepare to create a new strategic plan, I have been reflecting on our recent improvement efforts. They include:

- Establishing a committee of educators to improve the academic and social-emotional supports and intervention services available to students.
- Adding instructional coaches for teachers and reading and math specialists at each of our elementary buildings to support students who struggle and aid teachers in their efforts to provide rigorous instruction for all students.
- Hiring a director to oversee the English learner (EL) pro-

gram and conduct a comprehensive program review. We have also hired more EL teachers to address a growing number of EL students.

- Increasing access to preschool by creating a sliding scale for tuition.
- Launching a professional development initiative focused on equity and culture so we can improve our capacity to work with our diverse students and families.
- Rolling out a 1:1 iPad program, now in its third year.
- Renovating the track and athletic fields at Old Orchard Junior High so students and community members have quality spaces for sports and recreation.
- Installing security enhancements at all buildings.
- Establishing extracurricular clubs at our elementary schools.

I could go on about the efforts of our Board of Education, administrators and teachers to accomplish our mission:

Our mission is to develop 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.

Our commitment to students, parents and community members is to continue our journey toward excellence. Please take our Strategic Plan Survey and let us know how we are doing. Your feedback will help shape our improvement efforts over the next five years.

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

Please take our survey  
at [www.skokie68.org/  
about/survey](http://www.skokie68.org/about/survey).

**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.**