



School board earns statewide honor

District 68 has been named one of only 26 school boards in the state to receive recognition for excellence in governance from the Illinois Association of School Boards (IASB). The award was presented Oct. 24 at IASB's North Cook Division meeting.

"I appreciate this recognition as explicitly valuing the dedicated work our board has been engaged in together for many years," said Una McGeough, board president. "It doesn't change what we are doing, but it does show district stakeholders that we take our responsibility seriously and that we are dedicated to serving our district to the best of our abilities. It also provides a motivation to continue the board development work, so that we can hopefully maintain our recognition status."

The IASB recognizes those school boards that have "engaged in activities that lead to excellence in local school governance in support of quality public education." Beyond that, "good governance requires a commitment to improvement and



(From left) Supt. James Garwood, Board Member Meghan Espinosa, Board President Una McGeough and Board Member Joe Ruffner with the IASB award.

continual board development. This recognition is intended to honor boards who model these best practices on an ongoing basis."

All IASB member school boards are invited to apply for the recognition, which in this case covers 2016-2018. Districts can seek to have recognition renewed every two years.

The application process is rigorous and requires participation by board members and the superintendent. District 68 board members began discussing the process more than a year ago. "We realized that we were generally meeting most of the IASB criteria and that it wouldn't take too much additional work to meet them all," Ms. McGeough explained.

All of the District 68 board members took part in at least some of the required activities. Ms. McGeough and Supt. James Garwood wrote responses for the application.

The summary section of District 68's application states, "The profes-

sional development work that our board has undertaken over the last few years has been instrumental in furthering a culture of communication and collaboration, in service of the betterment of the school district." As part of its development work, the board engages in self-assessments, offers community engagement workshops and has developed a fair and robust tool for evaluating the superintendent. "We have cultivated a culture of continuous improvement for board members, similar to what we are striving to cultivate in all district staff and students."

Ms. McGeough said, "We gained a lot from the board development work. The time spent on deliberate reflection, discussion and examination of our guiding principles, our appropriate roles and many other aspects of board work was very important in establishing collective understanding and agreement about how we would work together."

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(From left) Armeen Sayani, Azra Sabovic, Amanda Merrill, Dasie Johnson, Trinette Lopez, Margaret Hitchcock, Chris Neal and Gabrielle List.

Welcome, new staff members

Armeen Sayani is a new special education teacher at Old Orchard Junior High School. She comes to District 68 from the department of student diversity and multicultural affairs at Loyola University Chicago, where she was a mentor in the Students Together Are Reaching Success (STARS) program. She has a bachelor's degree in special education from Loyola and is fluent in Urdu.

Azra Sabovic is a new first-grade teacher at Devonshire School, where she was a student. She has a bach-

elor's degree in elementary education from Loyola University Chicago and holds an ESL endorsement. She is fluent in Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian and Montenegrin.

Amanda Merrill is a new sixth-grade language arts teacher at Old Orchard, filling in for a teacher on a one-year leave of absence. She previously taught eighth-graders at St. Bede the Venerable School in Chicago. She has bachelor's degrees in education and history, and is qualified as a reading specialist.

Dasie Johnson is a new eighth-grade math teacher at Old Orchard. She taught previously at Acero Schools in Chicago (formerly known as UNO Charter Schools). She has a bachelor's degree in mathematics with a minor in history from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and a master's degree in public administration from Texas A&M University.

A former student at Highland School, **Trinette Lopez** is now a second-grade teacher at Highland. She has a bachelor's degree in elementary education with minors in Spanish and global studies from

Purdue University. She is fluent in Spanish.

Margaret Hitchcock is a new first-grade teacher at Devonshire, coming to District 68 from East Maine School District 63. She has a bachelor's degree in early childhood education from the University of Ohio and a master's in curriculum and instruction with an ESL endorsement from National Louis University. She has a moderate command of the Spanish language.

Chris Neal is the new general music teacher at Jane Stenson School. He has a bachelor's degree in music from the University of Ohio, a master's in music from DePaul University, and a second master's from the University of Illinois in elementary education. He has a moderate command of the Spanish language.

Gabrielle List is a new kindergarten teacher at Highland. She comes from the UCSN Charter School Network where she taught first grade. She has a bachelor's degree from Brandeis University along with an ESL endorsement from the University of St. Francis. She has a moderate command of the Spanish language.

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

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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.

New leader in place

District 68 welcomes Dr. Christie Samojedny as the new assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction. She comes from a similar post in Prospect Heights District 23.

“Dr. Samojedny comes to us with a wealth of successful experience,” said Supt. James Garwood. “She is passionate about children and education, and about collaborating with teachers, administrators and parents.”



Christie Samojedny

“District 68 was appealing to me for a number of reasons,” Dr. Samojedny said. “I was excited to work with Dr. Garwood again — we worked together in Palatine District 15. I also appreciated the diversity of the district.”

Dr. Samojedny holds a bachelor’s degree in education from Brenau University and started her career as a 4th grade teacher in Georgia.

After relocating to this area, she earned a master’s degree while teaching 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade at Virginia Lake School in Palatine.

Over the next 10 years, she served as principal at three elementary schools in District 15. She also completed a doctoral program in leadership in curriculum and instruction at Aurora University.

“I have been warmly welcomed and I am enjoying getting to know staff,” Dr. Samojedny said. “I am impressed with the commitment to continuous learning as well as to the creation of a culture that embraces equity.”

Dr. Samojedny explained that her job is to support student achievement, in part by ensuring that the curriculum is rigorous and appropriate. She also works to offer teachers professional development based on research and best practices.

Employing a combination of listening to stakeholders, analyzing data and visiting classrooms, Dr. Samojedny plans to “gather information to develop a short-term and long-term plan for curriculum review and professional development.”

School board election coming up

Residents of Skokie School District 68 will vote for candidates to fill three seats on the school board on April 2, 2019.

Those elected will hold four-year terms that expire in April 2023. Candidates must be at least 18 years old, U.S. citizens, registered voters and residents of the district for at least one year. Candidates do not have to declare a political party affiliation.

Nominating papers must be filed with the Cook County Clerk’s office between Dec. 10 and Dec. 17, 2018. Petitions and information about filing requirements can be obtained from the Cook County Clerk’s office at 5600 W. Old Orchard Road, Skokie (telephone 847-470-7233), or downloaded from the clerk’s website (www.cook-countyclerk.com/agency/elections) or from the Illinois State Board of Elections (www.elections.il.gov/InfoForCandidates.aspx).

State board honors Flood, Nelson

Two District 68 staff members have been honored with Those Who Excel awards from the Illinois State Board of Education.

Mike Flood won an Award of Excellence for his work as a school social worker at Old Orchard Junior High. He was cited for his leadership in creating Connections, a voluntary after-school professional development program for teachers interested in bringing more equity and inclusion into their classrooms.



Mike Flood

Mr. Flood serves as an advocate for students and often volunteers to communicate with parents. He works closely with teachers to address problematic student behavior. He goes out of his way to develop working relationships with people who want to develop a more welcoming school environment for all students and their families.

“I was fortunate enough to land my dream job right out of graduate school,” Mr. Flood said. “I have the privilege of being a school social worker in a district that serves a diverse variety of students and sees the importance of social-emotional learning.”

Cozeake Nelson, the District 68 transportation coordinator, received an Award of Merit. He was nominated for the excellent service he provides to families and staff.



Cozeake Nelson

Hired as a dispatcher/secretary, Mr. Nelson’s responsibilities have grown since. He has learned the hardware and software required to do his job well, and assisted with a successful grant proposal to acquire heating units to help the buses start during cold winters.

In addition to coordinating the department and supervising the district bus drivers and aides, Mr. Nelson often drives buses himself when needed. Parents and staff have praised his positive attitude, patient nature and service-oriented approach. Although he does not have children of his own, Mr. Nelson likes to say, “I have 2,000 kids.”

HIGHLIGHTS

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Letter from the Superintendent

Dear Community Members,

In the transition from the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) to the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), Illinois School Report Cards have changed. Now each school in Illinois will receive a designation of Exemplary, Commendable, Underperforming, or Lowest Performing.

The 2018 Report Cards were just released (www.illinoisreportcard.com) and I am happy to report that all District 68 schools received the designation of Commendable. In brief the designations mean the following:

Exemplary	Schools performing in the top 10 percent of schools statewide, with no underperforming student groups.
Commendable	A school that has no underperforming student groups, a graduation rate greater than 67 percent, and whose performance is not in the top 10 percent of schools statewide.
Underperforming	A school in which one or more student groups is performing at or below the level of the "all students" group in the lowest-performing 5 percent of schools.
Lowest Performing	A school that is in the lowest-performing 5 percent of schools in Illinois and any high school with a graduation rate of 67 percent or less.

The new report card takes many more factors into account when rating a school's success at educating children. I believe the new system is an improvement over the one it replaces, where the only indicators were achievement in math and reading on assessments administered once a year.

The following weighted indicators are now used:

- Student growth (50%)
- Chronic absenteeism (20%)
- Math proficiency (10%)
- English language arts proficiency (10%)
- Annual school climate survey results (5%)
- English learner progress toward proficiency (5%)

The new system is heavily weighted toward student growth. It accounts for how much students have learned over a period of time rather than how well they perform on the day they take the annual assessment. That is a critical difference for educators, particularly in diverse districts such as ours where significant numbers of students come from other countries and are not fully proficient in the English language.

Some aspects of the new accountability system do not feel like progress, however. One is grading schools on student attendance, something that is not within teachers' control. Another is that schools that are more diverse have more student subgroups (race and ethnicity, income, EL, etc.), which means more performance benchmarks. Additional benchmarks can make it more likely that diverse schools will be rated poorly.

Finally, the rating system metrics still do not take into account factors that make our schools remarkable places for students to grow. Metrics do not portray student-teacher relationships and the ways teachers help children develop. They cannot quantify the teacher-guided social learning so critical for student development, or the care, compassion and commitment of our staff. I am happy that our schools all received a commendable designation, and beyond the numbers I know that our students, teachers and administrators are *exemplary*. Many of the most important gifts our children receive in their public education are truly immeasurable.

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.