



FALL 2022

FOCUS

A newsletter to the D303 Community

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Norton Creek, North Earn Top Honors as National Blue Ribbon Recipients

Principal Tony White vividly remembers the voicemail he received that started Norton Creek Elementary on the path to receiving a 2022 National Blue Ribbon Award. It came from Dr. Shuan Chiu with the Assessment Department at the Illinois State Board of Education. "I gave her a call back and she said 'You should be very proud of your school because I would like to nominate you on behalf of the Illinois State Board of Education to be a National Blue Ribbon School,'" White described.

National Blue Ribbon Schools are recognized for overall academic performance or progress in closing achievement gaps among student subgroups. Public schools are nominated by the chief school officer in each state based in part on key performance indicators over several years. Schools must then submit updated data to qualify. Norton Creek Elementary School and St. Charles North High School each earned Exemplary High Performing honors. They were among 297 honorees throughout the nation and two of just 17 schools in Illinois.

"It really is a community award," said Shanna Lewis, Principal at St. Charles North. "We've talked a lot this year about the concept of collective responsibility. I think we're always looking at ways to improve our relationships with the schools that feed in as part of that whole unit district system."

White and Lewis credit their teams with building a strong system of support that is crucial to student performance and well-being. At Norton Creek, that meant strengthening its collaborative learning systems through the years, one academic program and service at a time. At St. Charles North, the focus for each day is on empowering teachers to hone their craft and creating environments in which students feel that they belong. "Our schools have different populations, but the core values, the non-negotiables, are the same," said Lewis. "That leads into the community, and that's what makes it strong."

"If you just execute the St. Charles playbook," added White, "while also listening to your staff, your students, and your parents and implementing at a pace that makes sense; good things are going to happen."

WE BELONG IN DISTRICT 303

A Message from Superintendent Gordon

When our students feel welcomed at school and are confident in their abilities, there is no limit to what they can achieve. It starts with the collective and daily commitment of our District 303 staff, from our custodians and lunch room servers to our bus drivers and teachers. In my first four months as your Superintendent, I've had the incredible opportunity to witness the pride of District 303 firsthand and how that drives student learning.

That pride is on display throughout this newsletter, with our cover story on District 303's National Blue Ribbon Schools. In the pages to follow you'll learn about award-winning instruction at Fox Ridge Early Childhood Center, thoughtful artistic expression at Wild Rose Elementary School, academic excellence from our National Merit Scholarship Semifinalists and more.

The quality instruction these stories exhibit, along with strong support services and daily student engagement we offer is how we honor the dignity of every person and help grow our culture of belonging. I want to thank our Board for selecting the term belonging, along with perseverance and achievement, as the District's three values. Our Strategic Plan Development Committee is working to define these terms and establish the framework that will guide our long-range vision.

Since starting my role in July, I have also had several opportunities to connect with our parents and community at various school events, our Listen Learn Return initiative and through visits with many of our local organizations. I am pleased to see so much passion for District 303 and know we can harness that passion to experience even greater success. We can achieve a lot as a District. We can achieve even more when we partner.

As you read further, please enjoy a more detailed review of our ongoing initiatives, from our listening sessions and strategic planning to an update from our Board, as well as the many highlights within our schools so far this academic year. I am proud to serve as your Superintendent and excited for the path we're charting forward together for District 303.



School Board Update

Board President Heidi Fairgrieve



On behalf of the CUSD 303 School Board, I would like to share updates on key activities and decisions that we have made since the summer.

- Welcomed new Superintendent Dr. Paul Gordon and several other new administrators to the District 303 family.
- Hired a demographer to conduct enrollment and facility capacity studies, and approved a set of guiding principles to help prioritize future projects for the Facility Master Plan.
- Adopted balanced budgets for FY 2022-2023 for District 303 and the Mid-Valley Special Education Cooperative.
- Identified three values to guide the Board: Belonging, Perseverance, and Achievement. Dr. Gordon has established a Strategic Plan Development Committee to define these values and support our Strategic Plan efforts.
- Received the findings of the Equity Audit to understand where inequities exist within our systems. Dr. Gordon has formed an Equity Committee to identify action items.
- Reviewed the annual Student Achievement Report to assess progress and opportunities for growth within our schools.

2022-2023 SCHOOL BOARD

Heidi Fairgrieve
President
Joseph Lackner
Vice President
Becky McCabe
Secretary

Jillian Barker
Kate Bell
Matthew Kuschert
Edward McNally



Building a Strategic Plan for District 303

To guide the long-term success of District 303, members of the newly-formed Strategic Plan Development and Equity committees are routinely collaborating to create a foundation for the “how” and the “why” behind the work occurring throughout the District.

The Superintendent committees each consist of two Board members and nearly 20 individuals that represent District and building administrators and staff. Strategic planning is led by Dr. Paul Gordon, Superintendent, and Dr. Christine Igoe, Assistant Superintendent for Educational Services. Igoe also co-leads the Equity team alongside Dr. Tracy Taylor, Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

The Strategic Plan Development Committee establishes the District’s priorities, resources and intended outcomes that drive progress. Its work includes analyzing data from the superintendent search and Portrait of a Graduate roadmap, and defining the three Board-approved values of belonging, perseverance and achievement. Connected to this plan is the work of the Equity Committee, which is reviewing the District’s recently completed equity audit. Members will use this data and research on evidence-based practices to build an equitable and inclusive learning environment for each student.

Both committees launched this fall, and will routinely provide updates to the District community as their work continues through 2023.

East Engine Challenge Team Advances to National Competition

St. Charles East is home to one of the fastest engine-building teams in the country. In the Engine Teardown Regional Competition last May, students in the Engine Challenge Team raced to be the first to finish the disassembly and reassembly of a full 5.7 liter Chevrolet V8 engine. The team completed the project in just under 33 minutes, earning them a spot in the National Finals.

"There is nothing simple about the task," noted Tom Straiker, Autos Teacher and Club Advisor. To successfully assemble the engine, each student must have physical strength, endurance, and be able to effectively communicate and collaborate with their teammates in a high-stress environment.

The St. Charles East Engine Challenge Team will compete with 29 other top teams from across the country at the Performance Racing Industry trade show in Indianapolis from December 6-10. They will also have the opportunity to network with automotive professionals to expand their industry knowledge and career potential. The team is currently fundraising for travel expenses and upgraded equipment to enhance their performance speed.



**Help send the
Engine Team
to Nationals!**



**Scan the
code to
donate**



Fox Ridge Earns Gold Circle of Quality

The Illinois State Board of Education and ExceleRate Illinois recently awarded the Early Childhood program at Fox Ridge Early Childhood Center with the Gold Circle of Quality rating. Programs that earn the recognition meet or exceed all benchmark standards in the areas of Teaching and Learning, Family and Community Engagement, Leadership and Management, and Qualifications and Continuing Education.

Fox Ridge Early Childhood Center provides District 303's youngest learners with opportunities to learn and grow through active, hands-on experiences. The program's developmentally appropriate approach strives to serve the needs of each child; typically developing, at-risk and those with identified disabilities. Fox Ridge also assists families in meeting the developmental needs of their children inside and outside the classroom.



North Softball Team Wins State Championship

St. Charles North's softball team has made history by winning the school's first-ever softball state title. In June they faced off against the defending state champion, Marist High School, and scored the go-ahead run in the top of the 7th inning to secure a 3-2 victory. "I have never been a part of a team that came together and worked every day for each other like this group did," remarked Head Softball Coach Tom Poulin. "The leadership and collaboration was the best I have witnessed in my 24 years as a coach of multiple sports."

Financial Update

The School Board approved the 2022-2023 budget for District 303 in September, detailing the fiscal health of the District and monetary priorities for the school year. The FY23 budget, at just over \$200 million, is made up of eight total funds that drive the financial support and success of students, staff and the District 303 community. Sound financial planning has helped the District maintain its AA+ bond rating, the second highest ranking for credit worthiness from Standard and Poor's. With a projected fund balance of approximately 56% of budgeted revenue, the District can confidently manage budget projections and is poised to navigate potential periods of economic uncertainty.

State Qualifiers

GIRLS GOLF

Emily Charles

GIRLS TENNIS

Kate Lauger (Doubles)
Avary Sitarz (Doubles)
Kelsey Jacob (Singles)
Sofia Radovic (Singles)

BOYS CROSS COUNTRY

Adrian Ahuatl, Greyson Ellensohn,
Oscar Frontjes, Mitch Garcia,
Lexton Rockwell, Jedidiah Wilson,
Michael Wilson

GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY

Marley Andelman, Eleanor Clark,
Amalia Im, Lauren Lewison,
Maahi Patel, Morgan Sandlund,
Brooklyn Walker

ISO BOWLING

Mitchell Hahn (Doubles)
Marion Miller (Doubles)
Zach Staker (Singles)

BOYS GOLF:

Clay Heilman

GIRLS TENNIS

Alyssa Joseph (Doubles)
Shannon Lu (Doubles)
Allison Gizewicz (Singles)

CROSS COUNTRY

Norah Dorrance (Individual)
Camille Sabau (Individual)

2023 NATIONAL MERIT SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Congratulations to our Semifinalists!



St. Charles East

Matthew Hall
Nathan Throneburg



St. Charles North

Andrew Nesterov

Commended Students



St. Charles East

Clare Archbold
Christopher Barbera
Nathan Borgstrom
Rachel Cornille
Daniel Flores
Jack Griffin
Andrew Komerska
Abigail Kreeger
Peyton LaCroix
Emma Maxwell
Clara Owen
Dylan Platt
Maggie Rich
Jackson Sengenberger
Ryan Sponzilli
Amanda Stepien
Andrew Szuch
Hannah Wojcik



St. Charles North

Skyler Bell
Alexandra Bryner
Stephen DelBello
Hayley Giancaterino
Adeline Grimm
Nikhil Gupta
Robert Kemp
Kane Kriz
Anatoliy Lynevych
Kayla Menough
Hanna Rey
Cameron Ring
Mia Rodriguez
Ella Roth
Joshua Wahl
Emily Watanapongse

28th Annual Kick-a-Thon

It was an amazing night at the 28th Annual Kick-A-Thon on October 7 at St. Charles North. Representatives from all the schools paraded around the field with their Kick-a-Thon banners before lining up to “kick it” to cancer 100 times. This year’s event benefits three organizations. Fox Valley Food for Health offers meal services to those facing a health crisis. The Colette A. Miles Foundation (Colette’s Crew) provides support services to those diagnosed with cancer. Donations will also fund scholarships for student athletes established in memory of Justin Hardy, a graduate of St. Charles East who battled stage 4 stomach cancer. Thank you to all the students, families, staff and community members for their support.



District 303 Gives Back



The collective generosity of District 303 was on full display through our partnership with Big Hearts of Fox Valley (BHFV) for its annual Holiday Toy Drive. Each of our schools quickly filled and refilled their decorated donation boxes in support of District 303 families. Teams went all in to give back, from the student council at Bell Graham and DECA students at St. Charles East, to the theater department at Wredling and PTOs across the District. District 303 is proud to continue this partnership with BHFV and we appreciate their support of our students during the holidays and throughout the year.

Building Community at the Middle Schools



Teachers Encouraging Kids (TEK) is a program at Thompson that brings teachers and students together with a focus on building relationships and creating a sense of community. Team 8-4 hosted a pumpkin painting activity where students gathered to paint pumpkins and learn about each other and their teachers.



Wredling students collected candy and wrote thank you notes for care packages that will be sent to veterans and deployed service members.

The Art of Belonging at Wild Rose

Inspired by the District's theme "Be Here Be You Belong," Wild Rose Art Teacher Valerie Kelly helped students create self-portraits through a school-wide collaboration. The project transformed an entire wall into a portrait showcase, along with a painting of the theme words courtesy of Wild Rose parent Mark V. Schellerer of ER2 Image Group.

Two fourth-grade students, Faye and Jamian, also had the opportunity to present their artwork to Superintendent Gordon. Faye's piece was a color pencil replica of Vincent van Gogh's painting, "The Starry Night," with the addition of a drawing of Dr. Gordon. Jamian's work focused on representing each of the District's schools by drawing their logos using markers, colored pencils and crayons. The central focus was a drawing of Dr. Gordon as a superhero and positive messages.

"I am blown away by the kindness and the thoughtfulness and at just how beautiful the pieces are," expressed Dr. Gordon.



Munhall Writers at Work

Students at Munhall took their curiosity to the next level by interviewing fellow classmates, preparing stories and collaborating on solutions. The journalism project is helping students hone their interpersonal, writing and critical thinking skills. They were empowered to create questions based on their observations of school operations. Interview topics and written summaries focused on safety and school lunch options, among others. Afterward they shared what they learned with others and reviewed stories, similar to the collaborative editing process that takes place in professional newsrooms.

Listen Learn Return

Through our Listen Learn Return initiative, District 303 has been gathering valuable feedback from students, staff and community members to help guide our path forward.

It started by hosting in-person listening sessions where participants were asked to share their thoughts on District challenges, opportunities for growth and points of pride.

Key to this process was that participants learn the perspectives of their fellow students, staff members and neighbors in order to recognize where opinions align and how we can build consensus. To encourage honest and thoughtful feedback, we created safe physical and online spaces for people to gather and communicate in small and large group conversations while honoring established meeting norms. We look forward to sharing outcomes and action steps during our return meetings in 2023.

“
I felt heard and I especially feel encouraged about the future of our district.
”

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