

FOCUS

A Newsletter for the District 303 Community

Thompson Middle School Construction on Schedule

The project to expand and enhance the learning environments at Thompson Middle School is underway, and will continue through the summer of 2019. When completed, the project will result in 31 new classrooms, a new auxiliary gym, an expanded cafeteria, a new track and field area, and a bus drop-off and pick-up area behind the school.

A temporary fence is in place around the perimeter of the construction area to create a physical barrier from the construction activities, providing exterior safety and security measures for our students, neighbors and staff during construction. Inside the school, temporary walls have been constructed between active classrooms and the construction areas. As conditions change both inside and outside, these barriers will be adjusted.



East Entry – Parent Pick Up/ Drop Off



South Gym and Entry Addition



Cafeteria



West Classrooms and Entry Addition
– Bus Pick Up/ Drop Off

A drainage system is currently being installed underground to collect rain water run-off. This system will ensure that students can use the new track and field after a rain storm and will keep water from draining into residential areas near the school.

We are grateful to our community for your support, especially our closest neighbors who have been most patient with the dust, construction equipment, and buses during arrival and dismissal of students each day.

Inside This Issue

PAGE 2

Superintendent's Message

PAGE 3

Classroom Spotlight

PAGE 4

Art Educator of the Year
National Merit Semi-Finalists

PAGE 5

Students Making a Difference

PAGE 6

The Book Café at Wredling

PAGE 7

D303 Financial Update



A Message from Dr. Jason Pearson

As Superintendent of Schools I have the opportunity, on a regular basis, to visit our classrooms and schools. Each time I visit I watch as engaged students learn from supportive educators, in content and resource rich environments, aimed at providing students with a strong educational foundation. It is our goal to ensure that when they walk across the stage at graduation, we have opened the door of opportunity for each one of them, and they are fully prepared for whatever path they choose to take, be it a post-secondary education or a career.

In July I began my eighth year in District 303, and my first year as Superintendent of Schools. Prior to the beginning of the school year members of the School Board, as well as our administrative team, reviewed the District's vision statement created by community stakeholders over a decade ago. As we read each of the statements you see in this newsletter, we concluded that the core beliefs and community values represented have stood the test of time and continue to resonate with us today. We also developed strategic commitments that are a pledge to our families and community. These commitments, outlined below, will give you a glimpse into our work as a district over the coming year.

The District 303 School Community empowers and inspires ALL to:

- Attain excellence
- Learn with passion
- Live with integrity in a changing world

We will provide our students with innovative learning experiences that prepare them for post-secondary careers and higher education. What students learn today will need to be transferred to unknown and uncharted experiences, challenges, and opportunities in the future. Digital learning, college and career readiness skills, and engaging curriculum at all grade levels play a part in preparing our students to contribute and find success in a rapidly changing world.

We are committed to hiring and retaining high quality staff members. The research is clear, the single most impactful influence on student learning and achievement is the quality of the educator designing and providing the day-to-day learning experiences for students. When students have access to highly qualified teachers who are passionate about their calling as educators, they benefit from a chance to ask questions, show their creativity, and work collaboratively to solve problems.

We are responsible stewards of the resources in District 303 designated by and for our community. The demographics and student population in our district continue to change over time. This year, as we consolidate middle schools in an effort to conserve resources, we are also investing in both Thompson and Wredling to create optimal learning environments. On an annual basis, the School Board strives to create and maintain a healthy budget that supports the instructional programs and needs of the community across the District.

Through this twice annual publication, it is our goal to share with you information about innovative programs, dedicated staff members and engaged students who not only achieve at high levels, but also give back to our community. It is an honor and privilege to serve the students, families and community members within District 303, and I thank you for the trust you have placed in us.

District 303 School Board

St. Charles Community Unit School District 303 is governed by a School Board consisting of seven elected members. The School Board's power and duties include the authority to adopt, enforce, and monitor all policies for the management and governance of the District's schools.

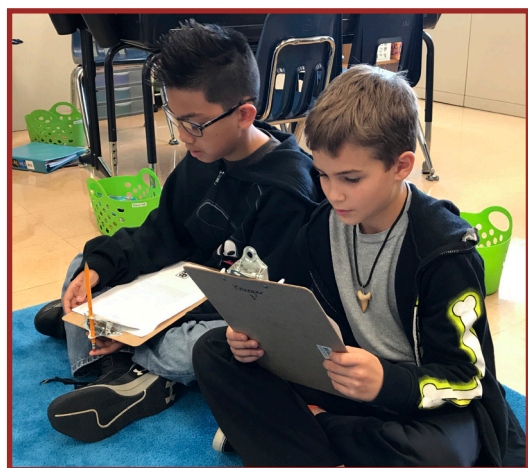
School Board members are guardians of the public trust. The School Board serves as the advocate for educational excellence for the community's youth. The policies adopted by school boards dictate the standards and philosophies by which schools are run and the criteria used to judge whether they are being run well.



Seated L to R: Heidi Fairgrieve, President Kathy Hewell, Secretary Lori Linkimer
Standing L to R: Vice President Nick Manheim, Carolyn Waibel, Edward McNally, James Gaffney, Jr.

Classroom Spotlight

Highlights from One Impactful Model



Children learn in many different ways. On a daily basis, teachers support those different learning styles in the classroom. District 303 encourages our educators to engage in ongoing professional learning and bring new strategies and ideas back to the classroom.

Prior to the beginning of the 2017-2018 school year, elementary educators from several buildings spent time learning about a non-traditional way to structure their classrooms called "Team Specialization". As part of this teaching model, students are assigned to a team of content area specialists. Throughout the day, students and their classmates rotate around the different classrooms.

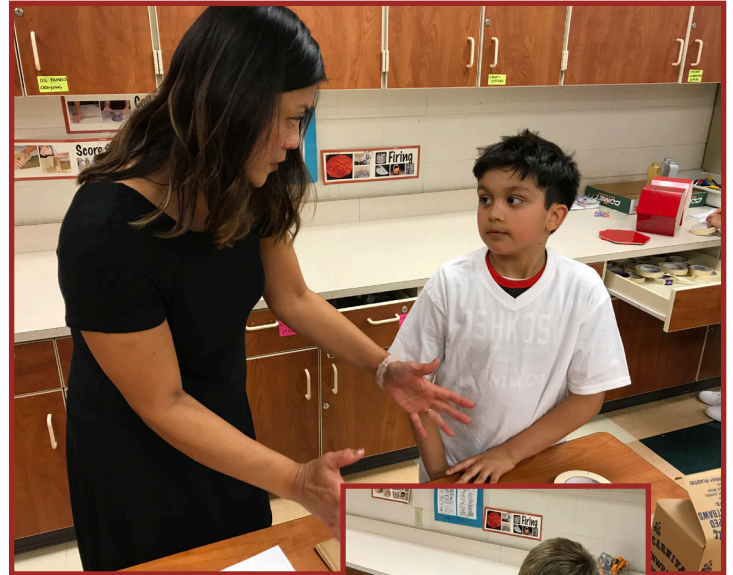
At Fox Ridge Elementary School, for example, students in the fourth and fifth grades are assigned to a teaching team of three content area specialists - writing and social studies, math and science, and reading. Each teacher has created a learning environment where their content areas are immediately evident. The reading teachers have baskets of books categorized by author or genre scattered around the room, with comfortable chairs and soft lighting inviting students to get cozy with their favorite book. The math and science rooms encourage exploration and provide study areas filled with information about the environment, other science and math concepts, as well as materials and resources for design and exploration. In social studies, students read a narrative, discuss the perspective of each of the characters and work with a partner or in groups as a means to learn how to discuss differing opinions in a respectful manner.

Students are enthusiastic about changing classrooms during the day. One student remarked, "I feel like we learn more because we focus on specific things in every class." Providing content-focused, learner-centered classrooms supports the high expectations and rigorous standards in the curriculum developed by our teachers.

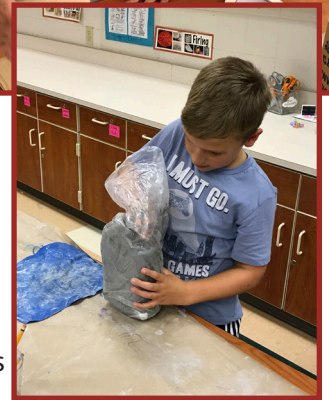


Elementary Art Educator of the Year: Mrs. Simkus

Fourth grade Norton Creek Elementary School students buzz around the art room looking for supplies they will use to create their masterpieces. They choose colorful pieces of paper both large and small. Digging through bins of plastic cylinders, a student finds the perfect piece she will use as a merry-go-round on the park she is designing. Two boys dip their hands in the clay bin and pull out chunks of cold material they will knead with their warm hands and mold into works of art. Another student tries to find the best way to cover a small wooden barrel. Gluing paper on it doesn't seem to work, so she decides to paint it instead. Their teacher, Joyce Simkus moves around the classroom answering questions, providing advice and pointing out materials they can use.



Mrs. Simkus runs her classroom using the centers concept. It exposes students to different types of mediums and allows them to make choices about their projects. This year, students are learning about painting, drawing, sculpting, ceramics, and print making. When students can express themselves using many types of artistic activities, and are allowed to choose how they will spend their time, they are more creative, more excited about learning and it becomes engaging and personal. The change has been transformational for both Mrs. Simkus and her students, "Now it's not my project. It's their own ideas and they are so excited about creating something that they are really into."



During the annual art shows that Mrs. Simkus organizes at all schools, artwork is displayed at students' eye level. She incorporates other fine arts into the show by inviting the orchestra and band students to perform for guests. Because of her transformational work engaging students in the artistic process, Mrs. Simkus' colleagues nominated her for the Illinois Art Education Association's (IAEA) Elementary Art Educator of the Year Award. In the narrative Mrs. Simkus had to write about her career, she pointed out that students are her focus. "This job is about kids. It's about being selfless. It's about making an impact in the community."

District 303 is proud to announce that Mrs. Simkus received the prestigious award from the IAEA earlier this year. She continues to be a creative inspiration for District 303 students and staff. Congratulations!



National Merit Scholarship Semi-Finalists

St. Charles North High School students Cole Hickerson and Jacqueline Oh have been named semi-finalists in the 63rd annual National Merit Scholarship Program. These academically talented high school seniors have an opportunity to continue in the competition for 7,500 National Merit Scholarships worth more than \$32 million that will be offered in the spring of 2018. There are approximately 16,000 semifinalists this year.

The National Merit Scholarship Program is an academic competition for recognition and scholarships that began in 1955. High school students enter the program by taking the Preliminary SAT/ National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test, which serves as an initial screening of approximately 1.6 million entrants each year.

District 303 Students Making A Difference



Micah Wilson Provides Journey Bags

Thompson Middle School 8th grade student Micah Wilson set a personal goal to help foster children transitioning from place to place. Learning about Journey Bags, he committed to raising funds to pack and supply 2,000 bags, each to include basic items such as shampoo, toothpaste, toothbrush, deodorant, hair ties, socks, lotion, underwear and an age appropriate toy or stuffed animal. Micah worked diligently to reach his goal and with the support of family, friends, his church, and a grant from the BMO Harris Foundation this past summer, Micah succeeded and has donated bags to CASA of Kane County and other foster agencies in Aurora and Chicago.



Make a Difference St. Charles Day – Mobile Packing Event

St. Charles East and St. Charles North High School students, partnered together for the second consecutive year to bring more than 500 volunteers together to fight world hunger

during **Make a Difference St. Charles Day**, held on November 5. This Feed My Starving Children Mobile Packing Event provided an opportunity for local donors to provide volunteers, funds, and labor to pack meals. Students worked together to raise over \$27,000, enabling them to exceed their goal of packing 120,000 meals, with a final count of 124,848.



Kick-a-Thon Raises Money for Cancer

The annual Kick-A-Thon community fundraising event, now in its' twenty-fourth year, is a joint effort spearheaded by the St. Charles East and St. Charles North High Schools Drill Teams. This years' event took place at St. Charles East High School on September 15 before the varsity football game between the two rival high schools. Prior to the event, student kickers from the drill teams were paired with 131 community kickers and corporate sponsors.

The weather was picture perfect as student representatives from District 303 elementary and middle schools marched around the track holding school banners signed by students as the school names were announced over the PA system. After the parade, community kickers lined up on the track facing the capacity crowd and did their best impression of the Rockettes by kicking 100 times.

Kick-A-Thon has raised over \$1 million to benefit the high school drill teams, Fox Valley Chapter of the American Cancer Society, Living Well Cancer Resource Center and Fox Valley Food for Health. The final amount collected will be unveiled during the crosstown varsity basketball game on January 12, 2018 at St. Charles East High School.

The Book Café at Wredling LRC

What does it look like to build a community of readers in a middle school? LRC Director Meghan Cannon, and her colleagues Mrs. Toht and Mrs Shaw, answered that question by creating opportunities for students to explore books in eleven different genres.

During the “Genre Book Taste” for sixth graders, students looked through mystery, science fiction, historical fiction, biography selections, and made a list of “ingredients” from each genre that interested them. The book that had the most “ingredients” they liked was the “tasty title” they took home to read. Students also discussed their selections with dining partners, and are writing a blog to share with other students.



Eighth grade students spent a short amount of time at each book table, “speed dating” titles. If they found a book they liked, they were encouraged to “date” (check out) that book before moving to the next table. If they found something more interesting at the next table, they could “ditch their date” and get a new title.

Mrs. Cannon was excited when students suggested book titles to her that should be on the tables, and even more excited when they had conversations with their classmates about books that interest them.

Communications Corner

Community members can be notified of District 303 and other Fox Valley announcements by visiting the Community Backpack, ENews, Facebook, Twitter, District Website or download the District 303 App.

COMMUNITY BACKPACK

The Community Backpack is frequently updated with events happening from non-profit organizations, intergovernmental agencies and business partners from the entire Fox Valley Area.

ENEWS

The District ENews is sent out bi-weekly via email. The ENews contains information regarding School Board announcements, schools events, school calendar events and much more. Visit the District website under “News” and subscribe to the Newsletters you would like the receive.

FACEBOOK & TWITTER

Like the District Facebook page St. Charles District 303 or follow us on Twitter at @StCharlesD303.

DISTRICT APP

The District 303 Mobile App is available for free download for Apple and Android devices. Search CUSD 303 in the App Store or Google Play to download the app.

DISTRICT WEBSITE

Visit the District website at d303.org.

Illinois Comptroller Cooks with St. Charles East Students



Comptroller Susan Mendoza continues a program advocating for healthy lifestyles through visits to local schools. Culinary Kids and Comptroller Mendoza provided students with the opportunity to put their culinary skills to use and learn how easy it is to prepare healthy meals at home.

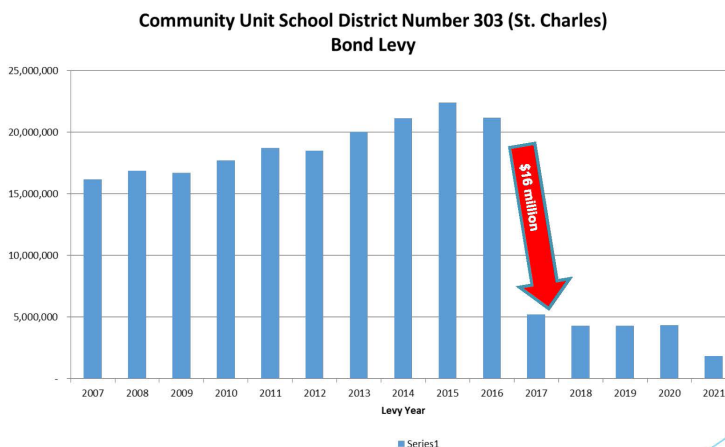
District 303 Financial Update

The District 303 School Board and Administration value the contributions of our stakeholders and feel it is important to continually provide a strong school district that remains fiscally responsible. The District continues to be recognized for our professional financial planning and public reporting of our finances.

- District 303 has the lowest school district tax rate in Kane County.
- 2018 taxes paid will see a reduction in the school district portion of the tax bill.
- Over the past four years the school board took action to abate (reduce) the tax levy saving taxpayers over \$6 million.
- District 303 earned a AA+ bond rating which ranks among the highest in the country.
- District 303 earned a perfect 4.0 financial profile rating from the Illinois State Board of Education.

Financial Outlook - Local Implications

Debt Payments dropping

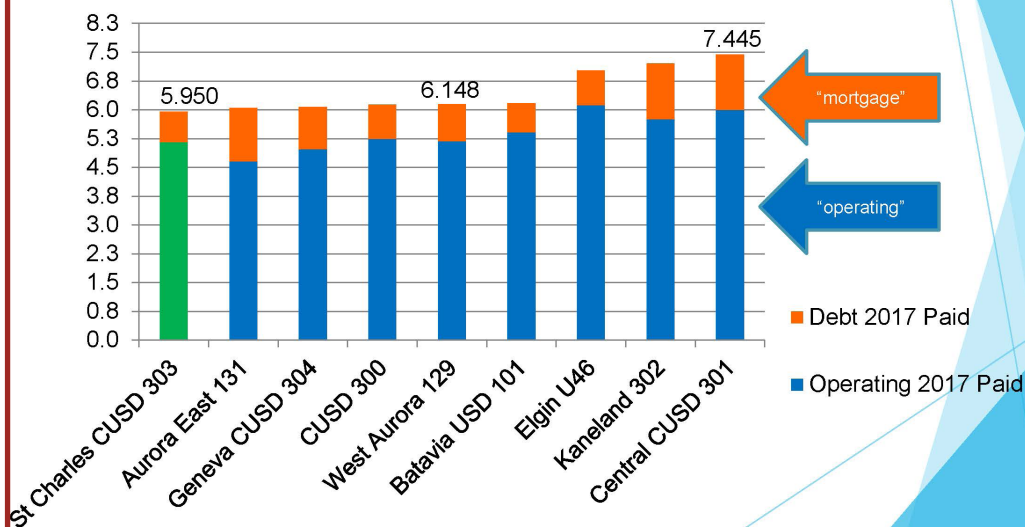


*Annual tax reduction (debt portion only) of approx. \$575 for avg. D303 homeowner

The school district utilizes a five-year financial forecast process which ensures the annual budget is consistent with maintaining the solid financial footing the School Board has worked to provide for the community.

The two charts reflect the pending decrease in the debt schedule which will result in the average taxpayer realizing even lower taxes in June 2018. The actual amount will be finalized in the spring of 2018, but District Administration estimates that a homeowner with a \$300,000 house will see a reduction of approximately \$575.00 on the school district portion of their tax bill.

Lowest Tax Rates - Kane Co. Comparison



ECRWSS Postal Patron

Please note: Because District 303 mails its publications by postal route, some individuals who do not live in District 303 may receive this mailing.

DISTRICT 303 CALENDAR

DECEMBER

December 25-January 5 - Winter Break

JANUARY

January 8 - School Resumes

January 15 - Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday

January 19 - Teacher Institute -
Non Attendance Day

FEBRUARY

February 19 - Presidents' Day Holiday

St. Charles Education Foundation

The St. Charles Education Foundation takes pride in its mission to serve D303 schools, teachers, and students. The money raised each year is given back to the schools in the form of teacher grants and scholarships for four high school students.

Mark your calendars for the Annual Gala, which will take place on April 7, 2018 at the Baker Hotel. Enjoy a great meal in a beautiful setting on the Fox River, a silent auction, and a live auction.



The Foundation is also looking for dedicated volunteers to join the Board of Directors. If you would like to get involved with a great organization that makes a difference in the lives of students and teachers by attending the Gala or joining the Board, please contact Kellie Capps at kcapps@culver.edu.