



Student musicians get to play with pros

The concerts at Old Orchard Junior High School in mid-February featured a real treat for the young players as well as the audience. Seated among the students and playing along with them were professional musicians from the Chicago Philharmonic Orchestra.

The concerts followed a three-week series of master classes and rehearsals in which members of the Philharmonic provided lessons and mentoring for the junior high instrumentalists. The program started in early 2015 and has proved highly valuable for the students.

"In our third year, the partnership continues to nurture students' musical skills through small group master classes led by Philharmonic musicians," said OOJH Orchestra Director Ingrid Nevinger. "The students gain exposure to an adult role model and get to develop a personal connection with a mentor. It also helps the students cultivate life skills that transcend music: self discipline, goal-setting, commitment, teamwork and standards of excellence."

In this issue...

Board candidates set for April vote—
page 2

Preschool reaching students in
need—page 3

Devonshire families support service
day—page 3

Letter from the Superintendent—
page 4



The OOJH band performs with members of Chicago Philharmonic, using the new modular bandshell.

The Chicago Philharmonic also offers free tickets to its concerts. Most recently, the Philharmonic donated a block of 200 tickets to OOJH families for its concert in Skokie on February 12.

Two days later, a small group of Philharmonic players sat in with the junior high orchestra for its February 14 concert at the school. The orchestra played a mix of classical, multicultural, contemporary and pop selections, including "Hiawatha," "Moonlight Tango," "Finger Rock," Gauntlet," "Le Froid de L'Hiver," "Uptown Funk," "Serendipity Suite" and "Rolling in the Deep."

The following day, the OOJH band played a concert based on the theme of Montagues and Capulets. The program included "Romeo and Juliet," "Legend of Taum Sauk," "West Side Story," "Ritual Fire Dance" and "Transit of Venus." At the same concert, the jazz band performed "Crazy Little Thing Called Love," "My Funny Valentine" and "Fever." Philharmonic musicians

were on hand for this concert as well.

The February concerts also marked the first public appearance of District 68's new bandshell.

Because a school gym offers challenges working with sound, the District 68 school board voted to purchase six acoustical shells. When grouped together behind the musicians, the adjustable units form a bandshell that refines and projects the sound. Better balance and increased dynamic range make for a better listening experience.

From now on, all District 68 musical groups will be able to use the acoustical shells for concerts at the junior high. "This benefits the entire district, and it's a way to show our appreciation for the arts," said Dr. James Garwood.

Visit www.skokie68.org to see upcoming events on the school calendar.

Board candidates set for April vote

District 68 residents will vote for candidates to fill four school board seats on April 4, 2017. Those running include three current board members and one newcomer.

Una McGeough was appointed to the board in 2008 and elected to her first four-year term in 2009. She currently serves as board president. She and her husband have one son in junior high, another in high school and a third in college. She works for the Searle Center for Advancing Learning and Teaching at Northwestern University.

Ms. McGeough said her decision to run again “was based primarily on the desire to continue in a community service role where I can offer considerable experience.”

She looks forward to the challenges of negotiating a new teachers contract, developing a new strategic plan and working to narrow the achievement gaps between different groups of students.

Acknowledging that District 68 faces uncertainties regarding state funding and federal education policy, Ms. McGeough said, “I have the highest confidence in our excellent administrative leadership and dedicated teachers. The district’s strong commitment to fiscal prudence, together with a supportive community and a collaborative and committed board, positions us well to respond to the challenges that lie ahead.”

Currently the board vice president, Amy Anson is running for her third term. She is a clinical psychologist who taught for several years at Northwestern University. She and her husband have two college-age daughters who attended district schools.

Dr. Anson said she decided to run again “because we are in the middle of work on several ex-



Una McGeough



Amy Anson



Frank Alkyer



Joe Ruffner

citng and potentially impactful programs, making it a hard time to step down. It is hard to walk away from things in which we feel invested, and that is true for me about District 68 and its students.”

Noting many of the same issues that Ms. McGeough discussed, Dr. Anson said, “I believe the district is in an excellent position to meet the challenges. We are in strong fiscal position. We have a strong group of administrators and a teaching staff that is committed and talented. We have always had a changing demographic and are well equipped to continue to adapt to new situations as circumstances change.”

Frank Alkyer is the publisher of DownBeat, Music Inc. and UpBeat Daily magazines and has a college-graduate daughter who attended district schools. He is winding up his first term on the board.

Mr. Alkyer said, “I’m running, partially, for selfish reasons: Good schools mean strong property values. Beyond that, these are fascinating times for public education, especially in a community as diverse as Skokie. I want to be there to help this district give our children a world-class education.”

While a new teachers contract and strategic plan are important, “our biggest challenge is change. But this district is very well positioned to succeed in the face of change. It’s fiscally sound. It’s well run. It has talented educators, passionate parents and an engaged, pro-education community at large.”

Running for the first time is Joe Ruffner. He is a producer for Second City with two daughters attending Jane Stenson School, where his wife is PTA president.

A member of the school board nominating committee, Mr. Ruffner decided to run because he knew only three incumbents were running for four seats. “As we don’t currently have many school board members with young children in a district school, I felt I could provide that perspective,” he said.

One of the challenges Mr. Ruffner highlighted is also one of District 68’s strengths: its diversity. “With such a wonderfully diverse population, it’s in our best interest to find ways to give individual attention not only to an entire range of students, but also to our community of parents.”

Overall, Mr. Ruffner said, “With Dr. Garwood at the helm and a very detail-oriented board, it’s clear that we have the right priorities and attention being paid, especially adjusting for trends in national and state policy in ways that will keep District 68 schools running optimally.”

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
Menucha Levy
Mark Weil

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.

Preschool reaching students in need

Skokie School District 68 set out this year to make preschool more easily available to young children who need it the most. Midway through the year, with the early childhood program filled to capacity, that plan appears to be working.

The district revised the 2016-17 fee schedule to allow families who qualify for the free or reduced lunch program to have access to the early childhood program at a substantially reduced cost. As a result, families who might previously have found preschool tuition to be beyond their means can now afford the same quality programming offered to those who can pay full tuition.

"If we're really trying to close the achievement gap, we need to reach the families who haven't been able to afford preschool," said Supt. James Garwood.

District 68 has three preschool classrooms in its Early Childhood Center (ECC), each with its own certi-

fied teacher and teaching assistant. Classes are 2½ hours a day, five days a week and follow the school calendar. There are morning sessions from 9-11:30 a.m. and afternoon sessions from 12:15-2:45 p.m. in each classroom.

Two "blended" sections serve a mix of general education and special education students; two serve both general education and EL students (English language learners); and two are for students identified as needing special services by the Niles Township District for Special Education.

Enrollment now totals 100 students, which is the maximum number the ECC is currently equipped to handle. That's up from 83 students at this time last year. Dr. Peg Lasiewicki, director of special services, figures that 23 community students (not classified either as EL or special education) have come into the program since the introduction of reduced tuition.

"All the feedback we've received from parents and the community has been positive," Dr. Lasiewicki said.

Enrollment in the ECC fluctuates during the year, and sometimes applicants are placed on a waiting list until openings become available. If interest in the program continues to rise and the number of applicants increases significantly, the district would have to add preschool teachers and classroom space.

The early childhood program is open to children 3-5 years old who live in District 68. Registration for the 2017-18 school year is now open. Please call the ECC at 847-677-4560 for more information.

District 68 seeks substitutes

District 68 is looking for qualified candidates to serve as substitute teachers. "There's a statewide shortage of subs right now," said Supt. James Garwood, which means that not all teacher absences may be covered.

Substitutes are paid \$110 per day and work in a collaborative, supportive environment.

Candidates need a bachelor's degree or higher from an accredited college or university. The degree does not have to be in a field related to education. Licenses are valid for five years and may be renewed if the individual passes an approved Illinois Test of Basic Skills. Licenses can be renewed without retaking the test.

Anyone who holds a valid professional educator license (or an educator license with stipulations) is already qualified to be a substitute.

Applicants can apply online by clicking on the Employment link at the top right of the District 68 home page (www.skokie68.org). For details, please call 847-676-9000.

Devonshire families support service day

Students at Devonshire School had the day off for the Martin Luther King holiday on Jan. 16, but dozens showed up anyway with their parents in tow. The school PTA had planned a Day of Service in collaboration with the school staff, and 40-50 families came out in support.

"We live in such a diverse community here and we thought it would be a great idea to honor Dr. King's legacy," said Donna Parker, co-president of the Devonshire PTA.

"Our goal was just to bring people together — to talk, build relationships and get to know one another. The other aim was for our students, families and teachers to make a positive difference in our community," said Devonshire principal Hal Schmeisser.

Devonshire students collected items such as toothpaste, soap and shampoo. The families who came out on Jan. 16 packaged the items, which went to the Niles Township Food Pantry and Mary Lou's Place, a domestic violence shelter. The students wrote messages of support that went with the donations.

"We wanted the children to realize how good it feels to be of service to people in your community," said PTA vice president Nicole Neff.

"Our team felt the event was a success and will be looking to expand it next year," Mr. Schmeisser added. "Including all District 68 schools would be great."

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,

At one of my children's school events recently, I overheard a conversation between two parents who were comparing two schools in the large school district where I live. They repeatedly referred to the schools'

test scores in reading and math as the way to measure what made one school better than the other.

While I firmly believe that preparing children with the reading and math skills they will need for success in life is a core function for schools and something they should be accountable for, I also believe that focusing only on those two items misses the mark in determining a school's quality.

Test scores are important, but schools teach more subjects than reading and math. Since those other subjects are not "tested" by the state, we do not have quantifiable measures people can use to determine how we are doing in those areas.

Additionally, this focus on test scores misses the fact that schools are charged with much more than simply teaching academic subjects. These other areas are often "softer" in terms of measurability, but they are crucial if our young people are to develop into well-rounded, self-sufficient, and active members of society.

Parents are right to pay attention to their children's progress in math and reading, but should not lose sight of the less tangible benefits a good education provides. Their children's scores do give them an indication of how they are performing.

The problem arises when people look at average scores for the entire school and then make assumptions about the school's quality based solely on this limited set of data. A

school's average scores do not really tell you anything about the benefits that your child is gaining.

Students do not enter school with the same set of experiences, background, knowledge, or skills, nor do they leave with an identical set. Public education in America encompasses a comprehensive and holistic philosophy that focuses on developing children academically and cognitively, socially and emotionally, civically and ethically, physically, vocationally and personally. Our mission is to facilitate each student's development in all of those areas in partnership with parents. We provide the building blocks they will need to take their own next steps after their school career.

Many factors go into helping a child become a productive adult, and there is no way one assessment a year can measure success or failure. That so many people believe that one test on a couple of mornings in spring determines school quality, teacher quality, and student learning is a sign that we in the schoolhouse still have much to do to communicate the value that a high-quality public education provides.

In District 68 we are proud of our staff and the lengths they go to to support our students. We are likewise proud of the sense of community that pervades our schools, the collaboration we share with parents, our focus on academics and the arts, our commitment to service, and the enrichment opportunities we provide during and beyond the school day.

Hopefully reading this edition of *Highlights* helps to shed light on some of those less tangible experiences that we give our students in District 68.

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.