



'Lion King' a roaring success at junior high

In an event that interim principal Greg Hanson called an "extracurricular highlight" of the school year, students at Old Orchard Junior High School staged seven performances of the musical "The Lion King Jr." in late April. The show was a hit with all segments of the audience — students, family members and the community at large.

Altogether, 44 students took part in the production: 30 cast members who appeared on stage and 14 in the crew who built the set and helped behind the scenes. "We also had a few former students who are now in high school come back and help during the production process," said Meg Hickey, OOJH music teacher.

Ms. Hickey was one of the teachers who organized the show. The others were French teacher Ariane Petyt and language arts/social studies teacher Courtney Keenan. One parent volunteer helped out with make-up and supervision. "And all the parents helped provide costumes for their children and came to pick them up when we had late rehearsals, which was a huge help," Ms.

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Some 44 Old Orchard students participated in "The Lion King Jr."

Hickey said.

Auditions took place in early February and rehearsals continued well into April. Rehearsals typically were held after school and ran for an hour or two. There were also a few morning rehearsals before school during performance week to fine-tune the production. The show ran from April 25-30.

"The Lion King Jr." featured an array of costumes, some of them provided by individual students and others rented from the Devonshire Cultural Center, which had staged its own production of the play earlier. "The crew worked tirelessly to create costumes and set pieces as well," Ms.

Hickey said.

"Outstanding Performer of the Year" awards went to Nina Malhotra and Andrew Williams for their distinguished performances and commitment to the theater program. Honorable mentions for leadership and commitment during the production went to Emily Ebrahimi, Hugo Gonzalez, Greg Hernandez, Chloe Rybacki and Sofiya Zackria.

While students from all three grade levels took part in the show, Mr. Hanson said, "We want to offer a special thank you to the 8th graders who have enriched the theater at OOJH over the past three years."

Sterbenc joins board, Berk steps down

The District 68 Board of Education swore in three newly elected members at the April 29 meeting. Katrina Bell-Jordan started her third term on the board, having first been elected in 2011. Meghan Espinoza was elected to her first full term, having been appointed in 2017 when another member stepped down.



Jeff Sterbenc

The third person to take the oath of office was Jeffrey Sterbenc, who begins his first term on the board.

A resident of District 68 since 2012, Mr. Sterbenc and his wife have three children who attend Devonshire School and Old Orchard Junior High. He is a supervising attorney at the Cook County Office of the Public Guardian, as well as the Public Guardian's Director of Community Outreach for the Juvenile Division.

Mr. Sterbenc moved to Skokie just before his oldest children started kindergarten, "in large part because we were very impressed by School District 68 and the wonderful com-

munity here in Skokie. Our schools are such a centerpiece of our life and the lives of other families," he said.

Mr. Sterbenc said he believes District 68 is on a sound financial footing, and that it does a good job meeting the needs of a culturally and economically diverse student body. He would like the district to "continue developing a more coherent and rigorous curriculum while meeting the unique needs of each child."

He added, "I have spent my career as an advocate for abused and neglected children in Cook County, and in doing so I have worked with school districts throughout the area to meet the needs of the children that my office represents. Becoming a school board member seemed like a great way to contribute to our community."

Mr. Sterbenc fills the seat of Richard Berk, who left the board in April after completing his fourth full term. A retired oncology surgeon, Dr. Berk served two board terms in the 1980s. After a two-decade hiatus,

he returned to the board and served another two terms. His children attended district schools, and his wife is a retired teacher who taught for years at Jane Stenson School.

"I enjoy giving back to the district and the community that educated our two children," Dr. Berk said. When he returned to the board in 2011, he said, "I ran again because I still live in the district, I have a vested interest in the quality of education afforded to students here and I have the time to participate."

While there were many changes from his first term on the board to the time he stepped down, Dr. Berk said, "Being a member of the board of education in separate decades is an achievement that is significant in my life. It allowed me to give back to the community and District 68, not once but twice."



Richard Berk

Longtime principal retires

When asked to boil her philosophy of education down to one basic idea, Sue O'Neil said, "We want the same things for our students as their parents and families do. There have been a number of changes in education over the years — an increase in accountability, the infusion of technology, more focused instruction for English Learners — but the thing that has stayed the same is that families and the school want the best education for the students."

Mrs. O'Neil retired June 30 after 25 years as principal of Jane Stenson School. "With 25 years of special

memories, it's hard to narrow it down to just a couple," Mrs. O'Neil said. "One of the things that I will really miss is standing in front of the students at our monthly assemblies and



Sue O'Neil

seeing all those sweet faces looking back at me. And one of the things I am most proud of is that I have been able to stand with the most amazing staff and work collaboratively with families as their children learn and grow."

After graduating from Northern Illinois University, Mrs. O'Neil began her career in education in 1986 as a special education teacher in River

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

District 68 Board of Education

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Dr. Amy Anson
Meghan Espinoza
Jeffrey Sterbenc

Dr. James Garwood, Superintendent
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.

District 68 Notes

New tool shows progress at a glance

Anyone interested in how District 68 is progressing toward its strategic goals can now use an online tool called a strategic dashboard to get a snapshot of the current status.

“The strategic dashboard is designed to show progress at a glance, with indicators tied to the strategic plan,” said Supt. James Garwood. “It’s a tool that lends itself to effective board monitoring.”

“We created the strategic dashboard to provide an at-a-glance monitoring and communication vehicle,” said school board president Una McGeough.

The dashboard (<https://bit.ly/2x7E1yc>) provides capsule information about four main indicators that relate to the strategic plan: student success, the learning environment, finance and operations, and district characteristics. The information is derived from a variety of sources, including standardized tests, financial accounting, student and teacher characteristics, and demographic data.

A snapshot taken in early June, for example, showed that 34 percent of students in all district schools approached, met or exceeded standards for their grade-level state assessment. It also showed that 72 percent of students were participating in co-curricular activities; 80 percent of parents were very satisfied with their child’s education; 74 percent of district expenditures went to education; and 51 percent of district students come from low-income families.

The dashboard also rates progress on the strategic plan. To date the district is 30 percent of the way to achieving its

goals for cultural responsiveness, equity and inclusion. It is 55 percent of the way to achieving its goals for teaching and learning.

New math curriculum arrives next year

After more than a year of research, comparison and test-runs in the classroom, District 68 will introduce a new math curriculum — Bridges in Mathematics — in its elementary schools this fall.

Math is a particular focus in the district’s school improvement plans for 2019-2020. There has been some decline in student achievement on standardized testing over the past couple of years, and the board and administration decided a review of the math curriculum was in order.

A committee of administrators, classroom teachers, math specialists, an instructional coach and a professional development consultant started the math curriculum review in March 2018. They went on to winnow the options to two, Math Trailblazers and Bridges in Mathematics.

Sixteen teachers piloted each of the two programs in their classrooms for 12 weeks in the fall and winter.

After hearing from the teachers, the committee met for two days on March and recommended Bridges. The school board voted to adopt it at the April meeting.

With a K-5 math curriculum in place, the district will conduct a 6-8 math curriculum review next year and implement it at Old Orchard Junior High in 2020-21. Then, the district will turn its attention to the reading curriculum.

Principal retires

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Grove. She gained a master’s degree in education and went on to serve as assistant principal and then principal at River Grove School. She came to District 68 in 1994. She received a Those Who Excel award from the Illinois State Board of Education in 2017.

Mrs. O’Neil said, “I view my role as a principal as really being a teacher in a larger arena, to both students and staff.”

In retirement, Mrs. O’Neil is looking forward to spending more time with her family. She has a few part-time projects lined up with some other schools related to providing professional learning to teachers and

coordinating parent outreach programs. And, she added, “I have always stressed with the students that they should READ, READ, READ! Now, I hope to do just that!”

Looking back on her years as an educator, Mrs. O’Neil said, “The biggest reward I find is watching students grow academically, socially and emotionally during the six years they spend in elementary school. I also take pride in the lasting connections families build to their school community. Elementary school is likely each student’s longest school experience in one building. Along with academics, those years are about teaching life lessons and life skills — being kind, compassionate problem solvers.”

She added, “I thank District 68 for

giving me this opportunity and I thank the Stenson school community for trusting me to educate their children. It has been an honor and a privilege, and I will miss being a part of a terrific school and the Stenson Lion’s pride.”

* * *

District 68 also bids farewell to these longtime staff members:

- Beryl Blumenthal, family and consumer science teacher at Old Orchard for 25 years
- Ed Boundy, language arts teacher at Old Orchard for 22 years
- Debbie Cano, teaching assistant at Stenson for 33 years
- Eileen Hafner, 3rd grade teacher at Stenson for 31 years
- Susie Rolando, health clerk at Devonshire for 19 years

HIGHLIGHTS

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Letter from the Superintendent

Dear Community Members,

As we wrap up another year of work to provide the children of Skokie School District 68 with a world-class education, it is a good time to reflect upon the District's improvement efforts over this past year, as well as those that will continue into next year. I want you to know that your child's school District is working harder than ever to address our mission (*see box below*).

The 2018-2019 school year was the first year of the District's new Strategic Plan and already much work is underway thanks to the dedication of the District's teachers and administrative team. Here is a partial list:

- This was the first year of the District's new English Language Learner Program that greatly increases the time our English Language Learners are exposed to comprehensible instruction.
- After a year of teacher preparation, this was the first year of implementing RULER, the District's new social-emotional curriculum designed to help students identify and manage their emotions.
- The District concluded its third year of professional development on equity with a focus on safety. Next year we will focus on race, ethnicity, language, and culture.
- The District continues to recruit candidates for our staff who reflect the diversity of our community.
- The Board of Education approved a new position, Coordinator of Curriculum and School Improvement, to develop greater capacity to improve educational outcomes for students.

- As part of our efforts to improve communications, the District is conducting an external communications audit to identify opportunities for improving our communications externally and internally.
- Our Board of Education received its first Excellence in Governance Recognition from the Illinois Association of School Boards.
- The Elementary Math Curriculum Learning Team concluded their work, culminating in adoption of a new math curriculum that will be taught starting in the fall.
- Three Learning Teams (Special Education, Advanced Learning Program [ALP], and Literacy) started to evaluate our programs, research best practices, and to make recommendations for improvements. These teams are to conclude their work and make recommendations in the 2019-2020 school year.
- The District Leadership Team participated in training to implement a new Districtwide School Improvement System, SMART, to focus on student achievement. Building-based teacher teams examined their school's student achievement data during the two days after the school year ended.
- The District launched a new Strategic Dashboard to monitor progress of the District Strategic Plan.

On behalf of our Board of Education, as well as our teachers, administrators, and classified staff, I wish you all a fantastic and joy-filled summer. We look forward to continuing our partnership with you, so that we can continue providing a world-class education for our boys and girls.

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.