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School board adds new members, new leadership

With new officers and two new members, there's a new look to the District 68 Board of Education. The board was seated May 1, following the April 9 election.

New President Una McGeough has one son attending Niles North High School, one at Old Orchard Junior High, and one at Highland Elementary School. She was appointed to the Board in 2008 to finish an unexpired term and was elected to her first full term in April 2009. She is a writer and environmental policy consultant.

McGeough said, "I feel incredibly fortunate to live in a district that is so rich in cultural diversity. For years, I've appreciated the fact that my children are growing up in a community that is a microcosm of the world, and I think their comfort with people from many different backgrounds will serve them well in their futures." That said, she realizes that District 68 faces many of the same challenges as other districts, such as coping with shrinking revenues and educating all students in a way that meets their individual needs.

With "dedicated, talented teachers and administrators, supportive families, excellent facilities, and a well-rounded curriculum," McGeough believes the district is equipped to meet the challenges. "One of the things I always tell my friends who live in other school districts is that District 68

takes very seriously the proposition that children deserve to be treated and educated as individuals, not with a generic or one-size-fits-all approach, even while we work to standardize curriculum and expectations across schools and classrooms."

Dr. Amy Anson, a practicing clinical psychologist, is the new vice president. She and her husband have a daughter at Niles North and a daughter at college. She was first elected to the board in 2009.

"As we look ahead, the big issues for the school board will be ensuring that we plan for the retirement of [Supt. Frances] McTague and find another inspirational leader and educator who can lead us into the future, as well as planning for the retirement of Beth Millard, who has kept our district fiscally sound and forward thinking for many years," Anson said.

Another important issue is ensuring that the curriculum meets the new common core standards that will be used to measure students' achievement, Anson said. "Of course to do this we have to make sure our teachers and administrators have the necessary training and support to put these new standards into practice. And we have to keep moving our technology forward, given the pace of change in the way we learn and work."

New board member Todd Fingerman has

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School board

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a master's degree in education and taught for eight years before entering the business world to work in the scrap metal recycling industry. "I ran for a seat on the board because my background gives me a different perspective and I want to give back to the community," Fingerman said. He and his wife have three children in district schools.

Among the issues facing the district, Fingerman cites the importance of math, science, reading and writing curricula that prepare students for the future. "Computers and technology are great, but kids still need to know what's behind the computer, and how to get the legwork completed," he said. He is interested in sustainability and the environment, and has concerns about security because of recent incidents across the U.S.

Mark Weil is director of information technology at RR Donnelley. He and his wife have three children, one at Niles North and the other two in District 68. He said, "I believe having three children in three different Skokie schools for the next three years gives me a unique perspective as all schools continue to constantly adapt to a changing educational environment. I also feel that many current District 68 efforts need to utilize technology to strengthen and challenge students, and I felt I could give back to the district by leveraging my professional experiences."

Weil said the district must stay focused on areas including student performance, the needs of a diverse student population, and maintenance of a fiscally responsible operation. However, he added, "We are lucky to live in a district without many of the major issues that are affecting other school systems."



The District 68 school board: (back row, from left) Mark Weil, Darius Zakeri, Todd Fingerman, Richard Berk; (front row, from left) Una McGeough, Amy Anson, Katrina Bell-Jordan.

Both Fingerman and Weil are taking advantage of online training and live workshops for new board members that are provided by the Illinois Association of School Boards.

They are taking over seats that had been held by two retiring board members. David Beller was on the District 68 board for 11½ years (2001-2013), including two 2-year stints as president, while Hank Schneider spent eight years on the board (2005-2013), serving as president for two years.

Beller and Schneider were involved in strategic planning, contract negotiations, and budget decisions. They played roles in a number of initiatives, including K-8 curriculum revision, enhanced communication with stakeholders, major renovation projects, improvements in technology, and development of the Niles Township ELL Parent Center.

Both men put their hearts and souls into board work, gave of their time—and cheerfully made cotton candy at Fall Fest every year for nearly a decade.

'Sharp, motivated' Kelly to be OOHJ dean

Students at Old Orchard Junior High School will be welcomed by a new administrator when the 2013-2014 school year begins in August. Bryan Kelly has been tapped as the school's new dean of students.

Kelly has worked as a social worker at Devonshire School for the past three years. Before that, he served a yearlong internship at Niles North High School while completing his second year of graduate school.

"It was quite a transition coming to the younger grade level at Devonshire after being at Niles North, but now I've worked both ends of the spectrum," Kelly said. "I think that has helped prepare me for the junior high level—I've seen where these students are coming from and where they're going to." It also helps that Kelly has been coaching the boys basketball team at OOHJ.

"Bryan Kelly is a very sharp, motivated

Parent Center welcomes new director

After five years as executive director of the Niles Township Schools ELL Parent Center, Corrie Wallace is moving into a new position as Director of Equity and ELL at High School District 219.

Taking her place at the Parent Center is Diana Juarez, a child of Mexican immigrants who grew



Corrie Wallace

up in Chicago and whose first language was Spanish. She served as a program director and then an outreach coordinator for the Latino Resource Center at Chicago State University. With a background in linguistics, she started volunteering as an ESL teacher at the center in January.

“The ELL Parent Center is unique in the diversity of the community it serves,” Juarez said. “I have volunteered with other organizations, but this one seems to have a personal connection with every parent who comes through the door.”

Niles Township superintendents began interviewing candidates in February, said Supt. Frances McTague. “We were very fortunate to find Diana Juarez. She has experience in outreach and networking, which will be valuable in seeking out parents or new partners who might not know about the center. She lived the experience of watching her own parents try to acclimate themselves and understand the American educational experience.”

Wallace has been working closely with Juarez to prepare her for the new position—introducing

her to partners, visiting schools, and sharing as much information as possible—and she expects to continue the mentoring process in the future. “I’m interested in the new directions Diana will be taking the center,” Wallace said. “She’s more than up to the task.”

Juarez said, “It has been an enormous help to share this time with Corrie, and every day I learn a little more as to what possibilities and challenges lie ahead.” One recent highlight for her was the Parent Achievement Celebration May 28 at Niles West High School. “Every parent who participated in a class at the Parent Center in the past year received a certificate, and got to share the evening with friends and family. We had four parents share their stories, which was wonderful. And of course everyone wanted one more chance to thank Corrie for all of the work she’s done in the past five years.”



Diana Juarez

The ELL Parent Center has come a long way since 2008, and Wallace credits much of its success to support from township school districts—especially District 68, which houses the center. “Everyone from Supt. McTague to Wanda Sindorf, the receptionist in the administrative building, has been very gracious toward us,” Wallace said.

And even though she’ll be working for District 219, Wallace expects to maintain contact with the Parent Center, in part because so many parents of high school students use it.

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young man,” said Supt. Frances McTague. “He knows the community, and having that social work background enhances the role of dean.”

As Kelly explained, there is overlap between a dean’s responsibilities and those of a social worker. Both require strong behavior management skills and attention to the social-emotional aspects of student development.

Andy Carpenter, formerly the dean at OOJH and now assistant principal, comes from a similar background.

“I have to learn about how the junior high works, and I know Andy Carpenter and [OOJH principal] Robyn Hawley will help me transition into the position,” Kelly said.

“We, too, are looking forward to having Bryan join our team at OOJH,”

said Hawley. “As a social worker in our district he already has established relationships with some of our students, staff, and parents. He is familiar with our systems, such as our CHAMPS program, which uses a positive behavior management approach. I’m confident he will be able to jump right in.”

Kelly replaces Mark Ribbens, who resigned after one year in the position.

IN BRIEF

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Frances McTague
Superintendent

ECRWSS POSTAL CUSTOMER

Board of Education meetings are held at 7:30 p.m. on the third Tuesday of each month in the Educational Service Center at 9440 Kenton Ave. You are invited to attend.

In Brief is written and produced by Complete Communications, Inc. Skokie, IL.

Renovations under way for Stenson, Devonshire

Construction crews will be back at work in District 68 over the summer, with most of the renovation taking place at two of the elementary schools.

Both Jane Stenson School and Devonshire School are having bathrooms remodeled, with new flooring, wall tile, sinks, and commodes. Both schools will gain new lockers, and the doors and storage units in all classrooms will be replaced.

Similar work was done last summer at Highland School, and the renovations that began last summer at Old Orchard Junior High will now be completed.

The heating and air conditioning system at Jane Stenson will be upgraded by replacing the boiler and chiller. Classrooms at the school have used rented air conditioners this spring, as the chiller was no longer functional.

“We are really appreciative of the air conditioning solution, as classrooms can get pretty uncomfortable when you add 20 students who have gotten warmed up from being at recess,” said Jane Stenson Principal Susan O’Neil.

Jane Stenson is also gaining a small addition to the multipurpose room on the east side of the

building where lunch, PE, and all-school events take place. The addition will make it possible to put a new commercial dishwasher in the kitchen and provide closed storage for chairs and tables.

“The addition work is well underway and the exterior walls are up. The construction crews have been working hard, rain or shine. The finished product will add to the overall aesthetic look of the school with the removal of the chiller,” O’Neil said. “Any type of renovation always requires a lot of coordination, but all the pieces are falling into place nicely so far. The students and staff will have an even more beautiful school to return to in August.”

ELL Parent Center

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For her part, Juarez said, “Meeting with so many Parent Center partners has certainly gotten me thinking about the programs and events I’d like to see in the future. I guess I’d say my immediate plans are to make sure I have a solid idea of what the Parent Center does and can do, and go from there.”