



iPad tablet initiative taking root

District 68's effort to transform learning by putting iPad tablets in the hands of every student—known as TLi68—has gotten off to a successful start.

"I couldn't even imagine teaching without the iPads now," said Renee Rowen, a 5th grade teacher at Highland School.

District 68's strategic plan sets goals of raising student achievement and implementing a multi-year technology plan that supports student learning and teacher professional development. School officials believe the 1:1 initiative is critical to achieving those goals.

The start of any new endeavor involves feeling things out and exploring possibilities. "Some teachers were anxious about doing the best they could right from the start," said Lisa Schwartz, assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction. "We said 'It's year one—try things, experiment. Use them when it makes sense.'"

"iPads in the classroom have really changed my role as a teacher. Instead of being the keeper of knowledge,

I have become a guide," said Katy Vega, a 6th grade science teacher at OOJH. "I also feel TLi68 has shown the students that teachers are still learners and learning never ends."

Teachers and students have been using a variety of applications to find information, work on projects and communicate. In many cases, teachers are giving students more choices and opportunities to be creative. Instead of simply saying "write a book report," teachers are challenging students to present information in imaginative ways. "And teachers have been amazed at what the kids come up with," Ms. Schwartz said.

A 3rd grade student said, "iPads make it easier to find information. I can always search for an answer when there is something I do not know."

First graders are using Chatterpix to make images speak. Older stu-

dents use Thinglink to add videos, music and text. With Explain Everything, students can import images, draw and record their own voices. Using Notability, they can annotate text on the screen. Seventh grade math students can do all their work on the iPad, eliminating the need for textbooks and even paper in the classroom.

A 1st grade parent said, "When I read with my son at home, he does not cooperate. Being able to hear him read on Seesaw [a computerized student journal] changed my thinking about my son as a reader!"

From the outset, teachers have received training to help them incorporate technology into the classroom, and more is coming over the summer and next year.

A team of instructional coaches

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TLi68 efforts to date

District 68's effort to transform learning began by increasing internet bandwidth and adding wireless network access in all classrooms. Each teacher received an iPad in May 2015 to prepare for implementation to students. Then, at the start of the 2015-16 school year:

- Each student in grades 3-8 received an iPad for school and home use.
- Each K-2 classroom got a set of iPads, with the goal of a 2:1 student-to-iPad ratio for 2nd grade and 3:1 ratio for 1st grade.
- Early childhood classrooms received two iPads.
- K-2 ELL classrooms received four iPads.
- K-2 special education classrooms received four iPads.

Altogether, the district distributed about 1,600 iPads. In 2016-17, the district intends to give each 2nd grade student an iPad for use at school (not to be taken home). Access will remain the same in 1st grade and kindergarten.

Renovations underway for OOH athletic fields

School officials plan to renovate outdoor athletic facilities at Old Orchard Junior High School over the next two years.

The estimated \$1 million project gets underway this summer on fields to the south and west of the school. The Skokie Park District and a local cricket club are helping to defray the project cost.

The south athletic field, which contains a soccer field surrounded by a running track, is patchy, uneven and riddled with divots, officials said. It will be graded and seeded with grass, but first, an unused baseball diamond will be removed and an irrigation and drainage system will be installed. When work is complete, the soccer field will be reoriented in a north-south direction.

Although the construction and seeding will be finished before school resumes next fall, the field will be fenced off and out of commission for a full year while the grass grows in and becomes hardy enough to handle use by students.



Signs such as this alert walkers and runners to the upcoming field renovations.

The track that runs around the perimeter of the field is at the end of its expected lifespan (installed in 1996) and will be resurfaced. Wear and tear from activity by students and community members, winter weather and damage from tree roots forced the repairs, officials said.

On the west field, an artificial-turf cricket pitch is being installed this summer. The Skokie Park District is contributing \$117,000 toward the overall project, with the proviso that the cricket club will pay for and

install the pitch.

In summer 2017, more repair work will be done on the west field. The existing baseball diamond will be removed and the field will be graded, leveled and seeded; it will not be available until the grass can sustain athletic activities a year later.

Plans also call for a detention pond to replace an old and obsolete asphalt playground adjacent to the two athletic fields. The pond will temporarily hold storm runoff until it drains away.

Registration set for early childhood program

District 68 is accepting applications to its early childhood program for the 2016-2017 school year. To be eligible, children must be between the ages of 3-5 and live within District 68 boundaries. Enrollment is open year-round, so parents can sign children up when they turn three.

The district hopes to expand the program from its current enrollment of 85 students to 100, according to Peg Lasiewicki, Ed.D., director of Special Services and of the Early Childhood Center.

“We want to make it possible for all District 68 families to participate in our early childhood programming,” Dr. Lasiewicki said. “Our goal is to reach as many children as possible and start educating them as early as possible.”

As planned, two sections would serve a mix of general education and special education students; two would

serve general education and ELL students (English language learners whose families speak more than one language at home); and two would be self-contained classrooms for students who need special services.

Tuition is on a sliding scale, similar to the free and reduced lunch program. Full tuition is \$325 per month, but nearly all families who have enrolled already qualify for a lower fee. (There is no tuition for special education students in preschool.)

Classes are offered mornings from 9–11:30 a.m. and afternoons from 12:15–2:45 p.m. There are still openings available for both sessions.

Interested parents are encouraged to visit the Early Childhood Center, 9300 Kenton Ave. in Skokie. For information, call Jill Marquardt at (847) 677-4560 or visit the ECC website at <http://www.skokie68.org/ecc/>.

Grading changes planned at elementary schools

A new approach in the elementary schools next year would make grading consistent from school to school, grade to grade and teacher to teacher. In addition, new report cards will reflect how well students are meeting academic standards.

A team of teachers, administrators, parents and a school board member and parent—Katrina Bell-Jordan, Ph.D.—has been working on the new approach since April 2015.

“We thought it was important to have parents on the learning team, partly because parents raise questions that might not occur to educators,” said team leader Lisa Schwartz, assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction. “As it turned out, the parents on our team were some of the biggest advocates for changing the way we report grades.”

The team looked at research on grading, examined models used by other districts and considered the purpose of a report card.

Traditionally in District 68 and elsewhere, grading has taken many elements from across the grading period—including tests, quizzes, projects, class participation and homework—and blended them to come up with a grade.

Teachers tend to employ an individual approach to grading, Ms. Schwartz said. She recalled a professional development session in which the speaker said to those in the audience, “‘Talk to the person next to you and ask how they learned to grade.’ It’s usually not at college—it tends to be something teachers work out on their own.”

To make grading less subjective and more meaningful, the new report cards will indicate how well students are doing in their main academic areas—math, language arts, social studies and science. The “grades” will employ

a scale of 1 to 3, where “3” means “meets grade-level standard,” “2” means “approaching grade-level standard,” and “1” means “below grade-level standard.”

Unlike the current system in which grades represent an average for the entire grading period, the new report cards will reflect how well students are doing at the time the grades are entered. In this way students are not penalized for what they didn’t know when new topics were introduced and their progress towards mastery isn’t averaged in with their grades before mastery.

Ms. Schwartz stressed that Illinois Learning Standards are goals for the end of the year, so parents should not be surprised if their children start out with 2s or 1s on the first report card of the year. It’s more important to gauge the progress each child makes over the school year.

The report cards also will include teacher assessments of student behavior, social skills and work habits, in addition to teacher comments.

“We think it’s important to separate behavior from academics,” Ms. Schwartz said. “I know some parents will say, ‘I want homework to count.’ The response to that is, it does. If a student is regularly doing the homework, that contributes to meeting the standards.”

With one minor exception for kindergarten, the new report cards will be identical for K-5 students. The district will provide training and collaboration time for teachers about how grading will work.

Ms. Schwartz noted that report cards are just one way schools communicate with parents. Nevertheless, understanding that report cards are important to most parents and that some may have reservations about the new approach, the district is developing parent-friendly versions of the standards, to be available by the time the first report cards go home next year.

iPad initiative

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are using technology to support teaching and learning at all schools. For example, they can video a lesson and then watch it with the teacher to help assess what went well and identify opportunities for improvement.

There is also an iTeam of 20 teachers who have received additional training that they can pass along to their colleagues, in the halls or classrooms. The first iTeam has been so successful that the district is adding a second one next year.

“The ultimate goal of all of this is student learning,” Ms. Schwartz said. “It’s not about technology per se—it’s about student outcomes.”

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

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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.

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Letter from the Superintendent

Dear Community Members,

If you have been a long-time reader of Skokie School District 68's community newsletter, formerly titled *In Brief*, you will undoubtedly notice changes. Our new publication, *Highlights*, incorporates our new logo as well as elements of our new web page design.

We hope that you enjoy our fresh new look and that it attracts more readers to learn about the excellent service that Skokie School District 68 provides to the community.

Now that school is out, I find myself reflecting back upon some of the accomplishments that have marked this very busy and exciting school year.

We started with the rollout of TLI68, our one-to-one iPad program. Reports from teachers, students, and parents have been very positive with regard to how technology has been able to transform teaching and learning. Over the last two years, the Board of Education and the administration have worked to increase and enhance the quantity and quality of our communications. In August, we rolled out a new comprehensive parent/student handbook that brought a wealth of important information together in one place. The Board worked to create and adopt a new District Vision and Mission, as well as an entirely new and updated set of more than 150 Board governance policies. To make the Board's work more transparent to the community, these policies are now available on the District's new website. The new website was launched this year with a new logo and look. The layout is more user-friendly,

providing visitors easier access to information and better representing the excellence of our district. In order to further support the social-emotional needs of our students, the district created the Bullying Tip Hotline, which features prominently on our homepage.

As part of our ongoing commitment to provide a secure environment, the Board approved the construction of a vestibule for our Early Childhood Program that increases safety for our students and staff. The Board also approved the construction of a new track to replace our aging track at Old Orchard Junior High, as well as an upgrade of the playing fields that are in sore need of improvement. The track and fields are used frequently by Skokie School District 68, as well as by our community.

In addition to these outwardly visible changes, District 68 teachers and administrators have participated in many hours of professional development and committee work in order to provide and improve upon the many wonderful educational services that our parents and community have come to expect and appreciate. The district is looking forward to an equally exciting year in 2016-17, when we will continue our journey to improve educational outcomes for our children and deliver the benefits and value to the community that an outstanding school district provides.

I am exceedingly proud to be a part of a school district that is so deeply committed to working together to prepare our children for their future. Have a safe and happy summer!

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.