



Outdoor Ed returns for 5th graders

One of many bright spots as District 68 fully emerged from pandemic restrictions this year was the resumption of Outdoor Education.

The Outdoor Ed trips, a memorable trip for district fifth graders going back decades, take participating students away from home and school routines to stretch their wings and learn in new ways. In May, students from each of the district's elementary schools spent three days and two nights at White Pines Ranch in Oregon, IL — the first such trips since 2019.

Highland School Principal Karen Bradley said the trips offer the students both academic experiences and opportunities for social development. Classes include aquatic studies, quarry and fossil studies, orienteering and compass use, and activities include archery, horseback riding, night hikes, hay rides and campfires. Students also play games and keep journals about their experiences.

Staff members who chaperoned the



Fifth graders get a chance to explore the natural world on Outdoor Education trips.

students enthusiastically endorse the trips. "The Outdoor Education experience provides a wealth of learning and social opportunities that we can't create in a classroom environment," said J.D. Lathrop, speech and language pathologist at Highland School.

"Whether it's a hike in the forest, touching a snake or riding a horse, kids are anxious, but try something new and almost always report feeling proud that

they've taken a challenge and want to do it again," said Jennifer Greene, who teaches advanced learning in grades 3-5 at Highland. "It's so interesting for teachers to see the students in a different setting, and also for kids to see their teachers trying new things."

Teachers embrace how students stretch and grow during the experience. "Each year we witness students

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District plans cameras at OOJH

A trial run during the spring has led District 68 officials to plan to place security cameras in common areas throughout Old Orchard Junior High School next year.

In January, Principal Greg Hanson notified parents and families that the school was placing cameras in two hallway "dead zones" — areas where foot traffic and adult supervision were less frequent than in the rest of the building. Hanson noted that such dead zones can tempt students to engage

in behaviors such as "play fighting," drawing graffiti on walls or bathrooms, or vaping.

San Mateo, CA-based Verkada installed the cameras, and also put vaping sensors in nearby school bathrooms. Although the cameras are not actively monitored, administrators have viewed the recordings when incidents are reported. For example, if a vaping sensor went off in a particular bathroom, they could see who entered and

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New social studies plan prioritizes inquiry

How can we make school a great place for everyone? How can we unite to build a powerful class community? How can we use wisdom from the past to build a better future?

These questions, and many more, come from the new social studies curriculum District 68 will employ this fall. They illustrate the questioning approach of that curriculum, called "Inquiry Journeys," from Chicago-based InquireED.

According to Christie Samojedny, the district's assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, the previous social studies teaching model was out of date. A team of teachers and administrators reviewed options and identified two to pilot in classrooms. Inquiry Journeys was the choice.

"The new curriculum is highly engaging and leads students to take informed action as an end result of each unit," Samojedny said. "It provides a shift away from teachers delivering instruction and towards facilitation of learning."

The curriculum had to satisfy several needs, Samojedny said. "The new curriculum addresses the academic goal of giving students voice and ownership in their learning. It addresses social science state standards in a way that

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. All are invited to attend.

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provides rich, interactive experiences in the content. And it also provides content that is culturally responsive, so our students may see themselves."

Some teachers didn't wait until the formal rollout in the fall. Lisa Goyco, fifth-grade teacher at Jane Stenson School, was one. In a unit called "The Colonial Era," her students tried to learn from history to address contemporary problems in their own lives.

Goyco said the students examined colonial social structures and how they influenced power, freedom, political participation and economic mobility.

"Some of the issues mentioned during classroom discussions included name-calling, homophobia, and racist comments," Goyco said. "Students realized that all of these unkind behaviors were examples of what could eventually lead to bullying. However, they did not want to make bullying the focus of their campaign. Instead they wanted to celebrate kindness across the school."

The class embarked upon a school-wide "KINDing Campaign," seeking out examples of kindness and rewarding them. They created promotional posters, wrote to teachers and the principal explaining their plan, and convened an assembly for students in grades 3-5 to celebrate the behaviors they want to foster.

It was a big success, Goyco said. "The sense of pride in their hard work was palpable throughout the entire afternoon that day. The students who were invited to the assembly and were equally excited. One teacher even mentioned that her students were looking forward to doing the 'KINDing' campaign when they get to 5th grade!"

Goyco believes her students are served well by the new curriculum. "They are engaged in meaningful discussions and clearly see the connection between the topics they are learning about and the challenges they face today."

Cameras

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exited that bathroom at that time.

The spring test convinced officials the cameras were needed. Supt. James Garwood noted that several nearby junior highs and high schools already have cameras, and added that they align with the objectives of school safety and promoting healthy behaviors.

School officials acknowledge that families and staff have raised concerns about privacy, but say they plan to use the tool carefully. By restricting access to video footage to administrators, and only using the footage as incidents warranted, Hanson said, "we could approach the cameras as adding a tool that would not compromise student and staff privacy."

School board members ultimately were comfortable deciding to expand

the use of cameras. "I've heard more from parents expressing a concern about school safety, especially bullying and vaping, than about the measures we've explored to create more visibility," said Board President Joe Ruffner. "It's easy to see how even the limited use of cameras we've explored allows our team to cover more territory in their increasingly busy schedule."

Hanson said he expects "the cameras/sensors will help us bring attention to mistakes being made," and thus provide opportunities to help students learn and grow.

Ruffner added, "This technology gives us better insight into our facilities in places where we can't always have trusted staff, and in the event of an emergency, we can coordinate a safe resolution of conflict with more visibility and access than we have ever had."

District Notes

The retirement of District 68's long-time director of English Learner (EL) services has opened the door for a successor with unique qualifications for the role.

As of July 1, **Dr. Barbara Marler** will step down after seven years working for the district, and more than 40 years as an educator in the EL field. During her time in Skokie, she oversaw significant growth in both the need for EL services and in the district's capacity to serve them. In the past five years, she said, the number of EL students more than doubled, while the number of teachers with ESL endorsements increased tenfold.

Marler said, "I appreciate the opportunity I was given to be a part of this work with truly remarkable educators."

The district's new EL director, **Karina Luviano**, knows firsthand what her students are experiencing. She is a multilingual immigrant who once was an EL student herself. She has worked in multilingual education for districts in Elgin, West Aurora and Palatine.

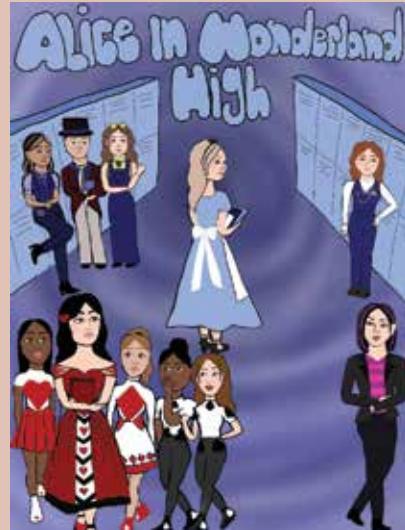
"I started my career as a teacher assistant and that is how I discovered my passion for teaching and learning," Luviano said. One of her first goals is to build strong relationships within the district and school community.

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The April election brought one new member to the District 68 school board, along with two incumbents, in uncontested races for four-year terms. **Dr. Katrina Bell-Jordan** and **Jeffrey Sterbenc** each won new terms. **Emily Lonigro** was elected to replace **Meghan Espinoza**, who chose not to run.

* * *

Old Orchard Junior High's various drama offerings culminated this spring in performances of "Alice



Poster designed by Nejra Sehovic.

in Wonderland High," written by drama teacher David Ello and based on stories by Lewis Carroll.

More than two dozen students participated in the production, Ello said. He directed the play, and was assisted in the production by Shana Schneider and Ryan Suevel.

OOJH offers four drama classes. Ello said the play allows students to put into practice what they have been learning in the classes, while offering a creative outlet for students not scheduled in the classes.

Ello believes the all-school production helps students "develop confidence and collaboration in addition to public speaking, skills which they can transfer to other areas of their lives currently and in the future."

* * *

District 68's cultural diversity was on full display this spring during a "Community Culture Night" at Old Orchard Junior High School. The event featured food, music, activities and a raffle. OOJH Assistant Principal Ferial Atto said, "The Community Culture Night is about cultural responsiveness, equity and inclusion. Our goal was to integrate our diverse community organizations and families into our school environment and build strong relationships with our students, families, and community members."

Outdoor Ed

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who struggle academically and/or behaviorally at school experience success joyfully within the unique environment and activities at Outdoor Ed," said Kitty Llerandi, a fifth-grade teacher at Devonshire.

Kim Weissenberg, a Highland School social worker, added, "One of our more quiet and reserved students demonstrated strong leadership skills on our most recent trip. She organized the campers in the girls' cabin and created a schedule for when each girl had a turn to take a shower each night, as well as independently established a 'Lost and Found' area in the bunk room. The other girls looked to this student for guidance and respect in response to her initiative."

Lathrop noted how the trips are part of the district's culture. "We continually have current parents and families talk to us about when they were in fifth grade how they went on Outdoor Education trips, and how much it meant to them and how excited they are for their children to have the opportunity to go."

At the end of fifth grade, students are on the verge of moving on to junior high — a new building, new classes, and a desire to assert new independence. The Outdoor Ed trips fit neatly into that progression.

"I think we've forgotten what it's like to allow our children to have time away from parental eyes and text messages, and to believe that they will be okay without vigilant watch by mom and/or dad; to believe that 10- and 11-year-olds can stand on their own two feet better than we think and that they can take responsibility for their own care and entertainment to a larger extent than we believe," Llerandi said. "Taking students away from the assessment-driven atmosphere of school and allowing them to soar in different, non-graded ways is liberating for kids."

HIGHLIGHTS

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Letter from the Superintendent

Dear Community Members,

This time every year I sit down to write my end-of-the-year piece for the Spring edition of *Highlights*. It is almost always an exercise in reflecting on the school year

just completed while anticipating the changes that the year ahead will bring. The 2022-23 school year saw the District adopt a new strategic plan, strengthen our crisis preparedness, select and implement new curriculum, approve construction to improve the teaching and learning environment, welcome a new board member, and take many steps toward a return to normalcy to the school year and the activities that occur in our schools.

As I finish my ninth year in the District, I have been reflecting with gratitude on having been selected to lead the District and on why I chose to continue serving as superintendent in Skokie. I still get choked up when I say it: Hate has no home here!

Among the many great things I could highlight about our District, this is the one for which I feel the greatest pride. We are a school community that unapologetically celebrates diversity in all of the ways that it presents itself, because that is our vision for why public schools exist. Every family who sends their children to the public schools has a fundamental right to access a quality education for their children. Additionally, our students have the fundamental right to be seen, heard, and nurtured for who they are without feeling somehow "less than" because of any

of the myriad ways that we can be ourselves — any aspect of their identity, be that culture, language, race, religion, gender or socio-economic status. I am not naive enough to think that everyone agrees with this. A quick scroll through the news offers plenty of contradictory perspectives and examples of intolerance against the notion that all human beings are deserving of dignity. One bright spot I might mention is that Illinois recently became the first state in the union to ban book bans, which is a tool to obscure the existence of identities that some struggle to accept.

I know I am a far richer person for having had the privilege to work here and to learn from everyone around me. Those are sentiments that I will carry with me as I enter my 10th and final year before retirement, and in the years to come.

At its June meeting, the Board of Education began the process of finding the District's next leader by selecting a search firm to assist them. In the coming weeks and months, the search firm will create opportunities for staff and parents to describe the qualities they desire in your next superintendent. That input will be used to guide the search firm, and the Board will use it when interviewing and hiring the District's next leader. The process will go on into the fall and conclude by early winter.

I am eternally grateful for my experience here and am excited for the next individual chosen to continue the District's bright path into the future. Have a great 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.