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IN BRIEF is published three times a year by Skokie School District 68.

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After testing, schools to adopt tablets

If you have children in District 68 schools or know someone who does, you may have heard references to the 1:1 initiative, or the new technology plan, or perhaps to something called TLi68.

Starting next fall, the district will be issuing iPad tablet computers to every classroom, every teacher and, for grades 3-8, every student.

“To some extent it looks like the focus here is on technology, but really it’s a shift in how instruction is delivered,” said Lisa Schwartz, assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction. “That’s why we call it TLi68—Transforming Learning in District 68. Putting these devices in the hands of every student gives them a chance to become more creative and take more responsibility for their own learning.”

Teachers all received iPad Air tablets toward the end of the school year and have begun to receive training on using them in the classroom. More training will happen over the summer.

At the start of the school year, students in grades 3-8 will receive their own iPad Airs. These devices remain the property of the district, but students can take them home at night and over weekends. “We think that home-to-school connection is critical. Having the iPad wherever they are helps students



Next year, all students in grades 3-8 will be using iPads.

stay organized and lets them communicate with teachers and each other even when they’re not in the classroom,” Schwartz said.

Every 1st and 2nd grade classroom will have six iPad Minis for in-school use. Kindergarten classrooms will have five iPad Minis while pre-K classrooms at the Early Childhood Center will each have two. The district will assess whether these younger students should have a true 1:1 program where there is one device for every child.

The decision to go with the iPads culminates a two-year process that began with a team of parents, teachers, board members and administrators who conducted research, talked to other school districts and industry experts, and weighed options in light of Common Core learning standards. The team recommended that students and teachers

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New, veteran members join school board

The District 68 board of education welcomes two new members and two others who are returning for a second four-year term.

Katrina Bell-Jordan was first elected to the board in 2011 and decided to run again this year. “I continue to be drawn to service on the board as a way to work on behalf of our children and community,” she said. “The district has experienced significant growth and change over the last four years, and it is a privilege to participate in planning and initiatives that will prepare our children for educational and lifelong success.”

She thinks the district has “strong and experienced leadership, a highly effective administrative team, and talented and dedicated faculty.” She also points to curriculum, technology, a strong fiscal position and “a rich, multicultural learning environment” as areas of strength.

She would like to see the district continue to focus on communication and encourage involvement from parents and the community. “In terms of a particular accomplishment, I look forward to the implementation and assessment of its TLi68 initiative,” Bell-Jordan said (*see story on page 1*).

Richard Berk is beginning his fourth board term, having served two terms in the 1980s when his children attended district schools. His wife taught at Jane Stenson School until her retirement, giving Berk an even greater connection to District 68.

“I enjoy giving back to the district and the community that educated our two children,” Berk said. “I also felt that the district is in a time of transition in both administration and curricula, and I was excited about being part of this transition.”

Berk said the district’s proactive approach to serving the needs of ELL students and families is a strong point, as is “maintaining a strong fiscal environment so that our primary goal of education is not compromised by limited resources.”

There is always room to get better, however. “Improvement is an ongoing process, whether it be in the classroom, the outdoors environment or in the administration of our multiple programs,” Berk said.

The newest board member is Menucha Levy, elected to her first term in April. She said, “My motivation is simple. In this position I am commit-

ted to serving as a volunteer representative of the taxpayers, teachers, parents, and most importantly, the children of District 68.”

A senior project manager at Breakthrough Technologies, Levy has 17 years of experience managing technology projects and programs with budgets up to \$10 million. She wants to use her professional skills to keep an eye on spending and technology integration efforts in district schools.

She has participated in local activities since moving to Skokie in 2009. “Having become a U.S. citizen in 2008, I have a clear understanding of the needs our diverse community and its ELL members in particular,” Levy said.

She has two young children who go to school in the district. “Student achievement is top of mind for me and I am well aware of what a great education our district provides its students,” Levy said.

Her family is from Israel, but she attended Devonshire School in the 1970s when her father was a student at Roosevelt University.

Although he was not on the April ballot, Frank Alkyer is another recent addition to the District 68 school board, having been appointed in December 2014. A magazine publisher, Alkyer volunteered to finish the term of a member who resigned.

Speaking of his daughter, who is now in college, Alkyer said, “District 68 was great for her and my family. I’d like to make sure it remains strong for other families. And selfishly, I know that strong schools equal strong property values.”

Alkyer thinks the district is very good at planning and he is looking forward to seeing how the new School Improvement Plans are implemented. “That’s a tool Dr. Garwood brought to the district, and teams of teachers, administrators and parents at each school worked extremely hard to put these plans together.”

Alkyer said the district is in a strong financial position but that funding cuts or changes at the state level could have adverse effects throughout Illinois. He said making sense of new student testing and aligning curriculum with Common Core standards is something the board will be watching closely. “The number one goal of the district is to improve student achievement.”

Tablets

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test Apple iPads and Dell Chromebooks, which were considered “best in class” devices.

Schwartz said other districts told the team “the devices help students become better at critical thinking, analyzing, communicating and collaborating.”

The district purchased 100 Chromebooks and 100 iPads for testing during the 2014-2015 school year. (A few iPad Minis were also purchased for grades K-2.) First, 6th grade students and teachers tried out the devices for 10 weeks, with equal numbers of students using each type of tablet. In the second phase, the devices went to students in 3rd through 5th grade. “When we collected them after the first phase to give to the elementary students, there were some pretty sad 6th graders,” Schwartz said.

Altogether, 400 students and 22 teachers participated in the pilot. Students and teachers completed surveys and took part in focus groups about the experience. The 6th graders even held a debate about the relative merits of the different devices.

When the pilot was finished, the iPads emerged as the clear favorite among students and teachers.

“The district hasn’t rushed into this; we really did our homework,” said Supt. James Garwood. “We’re confident this will support and enhance learning.”

Garwood added, “We found that there is more you can do with the iPads. They’re more versatile tools,

and there are more education-related apps available for them.” Garwood also noted that iPads are sturdier and tend to last longer than Chromebooks.

“The feedback we got from teachers was that the iPads allowed them to make a real change in learning,” Schwartz added. For example, students routinely make videos for class projects, and that is considerably easier to do on the Apple devices.

The district began allocating funds for the project almost two years ago, so there is already money available in the budget to pay for the new devices.

The initiative will require some infrastructure upgrades. Four instructional technology coaches—teachers with tech backgrounds—will provide support.

Additionally, 20 teachers applied to serve on a tech leadership team known as iTeam 68. They will receive advanced training over the summer and provide extra support during the school year.

Classroom teachers will learn more about bringing the new technology into the classroom over the summer and throughout the year. Schools will hold parent orientations at the start of the year. Parents can learn more about the iPads and managing how their children use them during a fall workshop.

Students will also have a short boot camp during the first few days of school. However, teachers and administrators expect that there will be a learning curve. As Schwartz noted, “We learned from the pilot that students are a great resource when it comes to technology.”

Preschool options abound at Early Childhood Center

District 68 offers a full range of preschool options at its Early Childhood Center.

The tuition-based preschool program has been available since 1973. In 2010 the district began delivering its own special education services to preschoolers with developmental delays at no cost to families.

With so many families coming from other countries, the district added ELL preschool for children who speak a language other than English at home (English language learners) in 2014. ELL preschool is tuition-based, but tuition is on a sliding scale with income considered. The ELL preschool program will expand in 2015-2016.

All preschool students spend their time on age-appropriate activities that help prepare them for kindergarten. The Creative Curriculum supports child interests and

play skills, encourages curiosity and promotes social-emotional learning. The ELL program puts extra emphasis on building vocabulary and English language skills.

All preschool programs are led by certified preschool teachers and aides. Preschool staff also include specialists who help monitor skills and development and work with classroom teachers to support student growth.

Preschool classes are 2½ hours a day, five days a week on the District 68 calendar. Parents can choose mornings from 9–11:30 a.m. or afternoons from 12:15–2:45 p.m.

Parents can enroll in a preschool program at any time during the year. Students must be at least 3 years old by Sept. 1, 2015, to enroll for next year, and must register. Call Ellen Ziarko at 847-677-4560 or visit the center (9300 Kenton Ave.) for details or a registration packet.

IN BRIEF

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ECRWSS POSTAL CUSTOMER

Board of Education meetings are held at 6:30 p.m. on the third Thursday 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.

As she retires, Millard earns praise

In the final year of her career in District 68, Beth Millard received the Monarch Award from the Illinois Association of School Business Officials (IASBO). The prestigious award recognizes business officials who have served their school district, community and profession with distinction and excellence.

And to think, when she applied for the job 33 years ago, Millard never expected to spend her career managing a school district's business affairs.

After graduating from the University of Wisconsin, she worked at a hotel in Madison. Looking for a change of pace, she began job hunting in Chicago. She checked a university job board "almost on a whim," spotted a listing for supervisor of accounts in Skokie School District 68—and got the job.

She liked it so well she went back to school to get a master's degree in educational administration in 1991. She moved up in the business office until she was appointed assistant superintendent for business and chief school business official in 2002.

Millard has worked with five superintendents and many other administrators. She said she learned from all of them and the last three superintendents—Tom Kersten, Fran McTague and Jim Garwood—"have been incredible role models. They taught me that making the children of the district your top priority

matters more than your leadership style."

Garwood said he has benefited from Millard's guidance and "institutional memory" in his first year in the district. "She will be missed," Garwood said. "For me, she's a real link to the history of the district."

Millard said she is proud to be leaving the district in a solid financial position. "We've had challenges, but we've stayed the course. We have been able to provide outstanding educational opportunities for our students without having to go to the taxpayers for a referendum. Our facilities have been completely renovated during the past 20 years to make them state-of-the-art learning environments."

Millard would like to travel after she retires, and has already planned a trip to Australia and New Zealand next year. "And I have three grandbabies under the age of 2," she said. "I'm sure they'll keep me busy."

* * *

District 68 bids farewell to six other retirees (years with the district in parentheses):

- Anna Lutgen, secretary at Highland School (31)
- Jac McBride, Director of Special Services (6)
- Nancy Rosenfield, teacher aide, Jane Stenson (10)
- Janice Rowe, executive assistant to the Assistant Superintendent of Instruction (8)
- Laura Ruth Wells, teacher aide, Highland (25)