

## In this issue...

District maintains top financial rating  
—page 2

Two new leaders named at OOHJ  
—page 3

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

Have a question or a comment? Want more information? Visit [www.Skokie68.org](http://www.Skokie68.org) or call the district office at (847) 676-9000.

# District employs RtI, 'No Excuses' to promote student success

**D**istrict 68 is proud to be part of No Excuses University, a national network of K-8 schools committed to preparing all students to go to college, starting in the earliest grades. The program is founded on the belief that all students—even those who have trouble learning—have the potential to succeed academically and that schools are obliged to help them.

Complementing its commitment to the No Excuses philosophy, the district is now using a scientifically based approach called Response to Intervention (RtI) to help students who are at risk

of falling behind their peers in academic performance. RtI is based on the idea that all children can learn when they receive high-quality instruction targeted to their individual learning styles.

According to Superintendent Frances McTague, "The RtI process fits directly into our No Excuses University commitment to ensure that all of our students are growing and achieving."

While most children make satisfactory academic progress in a regular classroom where they are taught the core curriculum, a small percentage may have difficulty learning in that setting. RtI provides supplementary, research-based instruction—

"interventions"—that focuses on individual students' specific learning needs.

As Jane Stenson School Principal Sue O'Neil explained, "We know that in order to close the achievement gap, we need to provide additional, focused instruction for our struggling students. Our faculty has worked as a team to creatively develop learning opportunities to support those students."

"We do universal screenings three times a year on all students," said Stacey Wolebin, the K-5 literacy coach. "We look at the data from those and other assessments to determine who is not performing

at grade level, and then give those students interventions targeted to their needs."

Early identification is important, because RtI can be especially beneficial in the early grades. It can help younger students overcome their learning difficulties before they become severe, enabling them to reach the same level of achievement as their peers.

"This year in the elementary schools we piloted an all-encompassing program with three components, all related to reading," Wolebin said. "We have a phonics program, which most children in kindergarten to second grade respond to, along with fluency and comprehension programs." The inter-

*Continued on next page*



## Student success

*Continued from page 1*

ventions are scripted and administered by reading teacher assistants.

O'Neil noted, "The majority of our focus has been on reading thus far, but we are now branching out to math and behavioral intervention."

Teachers and administrators closely monitor the progress being made by all students receiving interventions, to ensure that each child is improving. "We look for three to six data points that indicate students are meeting the goal of the intervention. Our objective is get them back into class," Wolebin said. "The great benefit of RtI comes when we see kids exit out of the program—and that's happening."

RtI is based on a three-tiered model. Tier 1 is associated with the general education instruction in the regular classroom, which typically meets the needs of about 80 percent of students without any type of intervention.

Students who are seen to be struggling with some aspect of learning are recommended for a Tier 2 intervention. Specialists work with small groups of students, either in the regular classroom or pulling them out for a session elsewhere in the school. The interventions utilize specialized curriculum materials designed to address specific deficits. They can take place every other day and may last from six to 12 weeks. Students are assessed every two weeks to determine if they are responding.

Children who do not improve with Tier 2 interventions move on to Tier 3. At this level, intervention is more intense and more frequent—perhaps as often as every day. The specialists work with only one or two children at a time, and continue to conduct bi-weekly assessments over the course of the intervention.

Wolebin explained, "With the technology we have and all the data we're collecting, we're really able to monitor performance and track progress. If a student hits a plateau and is simply not improving, we switch to a different, more intensive intervention."

"We intervene immediately when we have evidence that students are not learning," McTague said. If at the end of the process a child still shows no improvement, a group of specialists—psychologist, classroom teacher, speech therapist, special ed teacher, principal—looks at the data for that stu-

dent. "At that point we ask, 'Is there anything more that we can do, or should we move to an evaluation for special education services?'"

School officials stress that RtI is not a special education program. Indeed, RtI is expected to help many students who could have been placed in special ed in the past bring their achievement up to expected standards without calling on special ed resources. This proactive method is an advance over the older approach—sometimes called "wait to fail"—because it addresses potential problems as early as kindergarten.

RtI does have special education ramifications, however. Beginning with the 2010-2011 school year, schools are required by law to use RtI to identify students with learning disabilities before referring them for evaluations and special education services.

"We have been training teachers and staff in RtI for the past several years, with the help of the Niles Township District for Special Education, and this year we implemented the research-based instructional programs," McTague said. "Now teachers are collaborating regularly on student achievement and planning instruction to meet students' needs. We are ready for the law."

---

## District maintains top financial rating

Recent press reports have described area school districts coping with budget crises, many of which resulted in staff and program reductions. Fortunately, District 68 has maintained its high-level educational programs in these difficult times, through long-range financial planning and conservative fiscal management by the board and administration. For the sixth straight year, District 68 has received the highest possible financial rating by the Illinois State Board of Education, "Financial Recognition."

The district has maintained financial stability in part because most of its revenues come from local sources, primarily property taxes. A strong commercial tax base eases the tax burden on homeowners. The impact of the economic downturn on the overall tax base and tax collections is unknown, but the district is watching closely.

One state law that affects District 68's taxing authority is the tax cap, which limits the amount public school dis-

*Continued on back page*

# Two new leaders named at OOJH

Students and teachers are welcoming a new administrative team at Old Orchard Junior High School. The district has tapped Robyn Hawley as the new principal and selected Rob McElligott as assistant principal beginning July 1.

Hawley has been assistant principal at OOJH since August 2009. She succeeds Luis Illa, who has resigned after two years as principal.

Superintendent Frances McTague cited Hawley's skills in student-centered instructional programming, data analysis and organizational management as qualities the district was looking for. Calling her a "bright, high-energy administrator," McTague also said that Hawley's experience as assistant principal prepared her to step into the principal's role when the position opened.

"The past year has gone really well," Hawley said. "Starting out as assistant principal gave me a leg up for moving into the principalship next year. I've had a chance to get to know the staff, curriculum and students, and I've had a firsthand opportunity to see what's involved in being principal."

Before coming to OOJH, Hawley worked as a salaried intern at Senn High School in Chicago. She also taught in Chicago at Tilden Achievement Academy and Julian Achievement Academy. Before teaching, she worked at McClain-Hill Associates in Los Angeles and for Ohio Congressman Rob Portman in Washington, D.C.

Hawley has a bachelor's degree in political science and public administration from Ohio University and a master's degree in secondary integrated social studies from Wright State University. She is pursuing doctoral studies in urban educational leadership at the University of Illinois—Chicago.

"It's been a pleasure working with everyone at Old Orchard over the past year, particularly the hardworking staff," Hawley said. "We're already looking at changes for next year, including possible changes to the schedule. I don't know what that might look like—we'll form a committee and

research best practices before we do anything concrete. Any changes we make will be with the idea of doing what's best for students."

McElligott, a newcomer to District 68, will replace Hawley as OOJH assistant principal.

Although he spent the 2009-2010 school year teaching at Maine West High School, McElligott said he is "really a junior high teacher who happens to be working in a high school." He spent the previous 10 years teaching mathematics at Francis Scott Key Middle School in Silver Spring, Md., and Northbrook Junior High School in Northbrook, Ill.

McElligott received a bachelor's degree in psychology and secondary education in mathematics from Old Dominion University, and holds a master's in education with administrative certification from Northern Illinois University.

He also spent eight years in the U.S. Navy, where he served as a nuclear engineer on the USS South Carolina. Teaching courses in the Navy sparked his interest in pursuing an education career.

McTague said McElligott impressed the search committee with "his professionalism and thoughtfulness," along with his middle school experience.

According to Hawley, who served on the search committee, "He has some innovative ideas and he brings a lot to the job, especially with his math and technology background. We complement each other in many ways."

McElligott is well-versed in the use of interactive whiteboards, which the district is installing in all of its schools. He was behind a similar initiative at Northbrook Junior High, where the boards were used first in math classes. He also created a weekly one-page school snapshot that was e-mailed to parents as a PDF and posted at the school's website.

"I know a lot of people who know District 68 and I've heard nothing but positive things about the district and the school and the staff," McElligott said. "I can't wait to get started."



*Robyn Hawley*



*Rob McElligott*

## IN BRIEF

SKOKIE SCHOOL DISTRICT 68  
SKOKIE, ILLINOIS 60076  
TELEPHONE: 847-676-9000  
FAX: 847-676-9232  
WWW.SKOKIE68.ORG

NON PROFIT  
ORG.  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Skokie, Illinois  
Permit No. 55

### District 68 Board of Education

Hank Schneider  
*President*

David Beller  
*Vice President*

Amy Anson  
David Ehrlich  
Paul Livieri  
Una McGeough  
Tanja Tuck

Frances McTague  
*Superintendent*

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.*

## \*ECRWSS\* POSTAL CUSTOMER

## Financial rating

*Continued from page 2*

districts can receive in taxes from existing properties based on the consumer price index (CPI). In the past year the CPI reached an unprecedented low of .1 percent, limiting property tax revenues during fiscal year 2010. Some additional tax revenue comes from new property growth in the district, which has helped build a budget reserve in recent years. These reserves have helped fill the gap created by flat or declining state and federal revenues.

On the expenditure side, most costs are related to salary and benefits; education is a people-driven business. Over the years, District 68 has staffed its schools conservatively even as it met the needs of an increasingly diverse student population. The district also has implemented cost-containment measures while continually looking for ways to limit expenditure increases.

In Illinois, about 80 percent of school districts operate at a deficit and struggle to provide quality education programs. Expenditures consistently exceed revenues. The tax cap, business property tax appeals, the poor financial condition of the state, and continued expenditure increases for products and services pose significant

challenges for all school districts, including District 68.

While District 68 has been able to balance its budget for the last four years, district administrators anticipate a deficit for 2010-11 as they deal with flat or declining revenue and increasing costs. "It will be a challenge to maintain our reserves during these difficult times, but we are confident that our strong financial position coupled with continued prudent fiscal management will enable us to weather the financial storm and continue to provide a comprehensive educational program for our students," said Superintendent Frances McTague.

### Parents of private school students note

If your child attends a private elementary school (K-8) and you reside within the boundaries of District 68, your school may be eligible for Title I funding through the federal government. Please contact Assistant Superintendent Barbara Phillips at (847) 676-9000, so that she can contact your child's private school to discuss eligibility for this funding assistance.