



SKOKIE SCHOOL
DISTRICT 68

In BRIEF

FEBRUARY 2006

NEWSLETTER TO THE COMMUNITY

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

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Curriculum review and professional development

Teachers, students benefit from district's planning

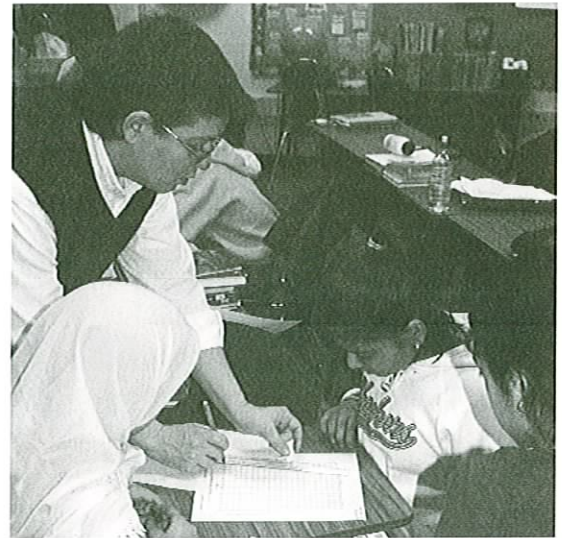
A fast-changing world expands the amount of information our children need to know. It also demands that schools teach students to adapt and “learn on the fly.” To do that, teachers and administrators must regularly evaluate what they teach and how.

Regarding the “what,” District 68 administrators believe their curriculum review process ensures that teachers have top-quality content to impart to their students. As for the “how,” the district's process of continuing professional development allows teachers to learn from outside sources, as well as each other.

Curriculum review

The curriculum review process involves the broader school community. The district forms a “learning team” of parents, teachers and administrators to study a curriculum area (reading, math, writing, social studies, science or PE/health). Barbara Phillips, assistant superintendent for instruction, said the team reviews research, studies best practices, looks at state and federal standards and visits other districts.

Once the research is done, the learning team drafts a guide to implementation of the curriculum changes. This includes es-



Fifth-grade teacher Lisa Nimz works with students on math.

tablishing goals, promoting best-practice strategies, choosing textbooks and other materials and providing a framework for assessing student progress.

Then the “implementation team” goes to work. It includes at least one teacher from each school building, with support from administrators and consultants. During the first year, these teachers get trained in the new curriculum and put it to work in their classes—testing, evaluating, editing and reshaping specific practices.

In the second year, the curriculum is spread throughout the schools. Implementation team members serve as re-

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Planning

Continued from page 1

sources to the rest of the teaching staff, by making presentations in meetings and by being around to answer questions during the school day. District officials say that in the third year, the new curriculum begins to take hold. After a few years of implementation, the cycle can begin again.

Curriculum areas are in different stages of the cycle. Writing is in the mature stage now, three to four years after implementation; math is in its third year in grades 1 and 3, and in its second year in the other grades; social studies is in its implementation year in grades 6-8, and is being piloted in the elementary grades; and reading is in its first year of implementation districtwide.

In math, said Supt. Frances McTague, "we were in some ways a little out of date. (Student) test scores were above average, but flat." Added Lisa Nimz, a 5th-grade teacher at Jane Stenson School who has been with the district since 1989, "Our basal series presented math as mostly arithmetic and did not show overarching patterns. Now, students see

the connection between math and its uses." Bobbi Michaels, in her 12th year in the district and a 4th-grade teacher at Devonshire School, noted, "Math isn't just arithmetic anymore. It's problem-solving and working together."

In social studies, the prior curriculum proceeded chronologically, and focused mainly on American and European history and culture. The new curriculum will follow broad concepts—such as enduring qualities of society, conflict and change, and how the modern world works—through time and across national borders. "We were looking at how the world has changed," said Dave Wiviott, a 7th-grade social studies teacher at Old Orchard Junior High School in his ninth year in the district. "The concept basis builds on skills; it 'scaffolds.'" said Sean Murphy, 8th-grade social studies teacher and department chair in his sixth year in the district. "It ties to current events and lends itself to higher-level thinking."

Reading affects every area of learning, and required the most intense review and implementation work—reflected by the fact that the implementation team



Students in Sean Murphy's 8th-grade social studies class study about South Africa.

used four teachers from each building. The new curriculum promotes "balanced literacy"—a roughly equal combination of fiction and non-fiction content—and breaks down reading skills into component parts. Reading implementation is in an earlier stage than math, but is just as significant a conceptual change, said Nimz, who has worked on both. "It was sometimes overwhelming," she said. "I am definitely a math-science person." And because the learning team decided not to adopt a sole reading textbook, there was a lot of work done by teachers on choosing the best classroom materials.

Professional development

Students aren't the only people in District 68 classrooms expected to be learning all the time. Teachers and administrators are, too.

Just as students must satisfy increasingly stringent learning standards under the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law, so do teachers and administrators, in the form of stiffer certification requirements and more proof of their ability to keep up with



Third-grade teachers work on reading with consultant Cathy Ellsbree.

District prepares for test changes

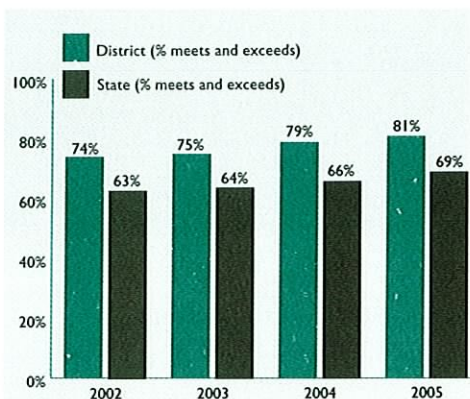
There's no longer anything routine about standardized tests.

In District 68, school officials are getting ready for key changes in the students who are tested, and the tests they take.

This spring, every student in grades 3 through 8 will take the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) in reading and math. In prior years, only students in grades 3, 5 and 8 were tested in those subjects. The ISAT writing test, abandoned recently by the state in a cost-cutting move, will reappear next year for grades 5 and 8, and will expand in the years to follow. And while 4th- and 7th-grade students will be tested in science as before, the testing will focus more on scientific inquiry and less on life science, physical science and earth science.

The tests themselves are also changing. Supt. Frances McTague said Illinois is changing the ISATs to "nationally normed" tests—ones that allow national comparisons of student achievement. Up to now, districts that wanted to make such comparisons had to offer their own set of tests—in District 68's case, the Stanford Achievement Tests. With the change in the ISATs, the district will eliminate the Stanfords and instead, introduce a new testing concept—computer-adaptive progress monitoring.

Progress monitoring assessment provides data on the individualized instructional level of



District test scores remain high

District 68 students continue to meet or exceed state learning standards at a rate beyond that of students statewide. District officials noted these key findings from the 2005 Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT):

- District 68 students performed better than the state average for meeting or exceeding standards in all areas tested (see graph above, which reflects reading, math and science scores);
- Three grade levels showed statistically significant improvement over the 2004 test—5th-grade math, 8th-grade reading and 8th-grade math;
- All other grade levels held steady compared to 2004;
- The district's 8th-grade low-income and disabled student groups showed measurable gains in 2005, after not making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in math in 2003 and 2004.

each student. It allows districts to track each student's progress within each year and from year to year. Using computers, students can be tested individually at several points during the school year, with their progress measured every step of the way.

IN BRIEF

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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.

ECRWSS POSTAL CUSTOMER

Early childhood registration starts this month

Sign-ups start Feb. 21 for next year's early childhood and child care programs. All programs are held at the district's Early Childhood Center, 9300 Kenton Ave. (the south wing of Old Orchard Junior High School).

The district offers pre-school for children who are at least 3 years old as of Sept. 1, 2006. Sessions are half days, either five mornings or three afternoons per week.

The pre-Kindergarten program is offered for children who are at least 4 years old as of Sept. 1. Sessions are half days, five mornings per week.

The Extended Day Program is

offered to students in pre-school, pre-Kindergarten, and Kindergarten through 5th grade. The before-school program runs from 7 a.m. until the beginning of the school day, 8:40 a.m. The after-school program runs from 3-6 p.m. (beginning at 2:30 p.m. on Mondays).

Next year's fees for the extended day program will be \$5.40 per hour, with a 5 percent discount for children enrolled at least three days a week and a 20 percent discount for children enrolled five days a week. The pre-school and pre-Kindergarten fees will be a yearly cost of \$485 per day of attendance, or \$2,425 for a five-day-a-week enrollment for

the year.

For more information on program offerings, applications and fees, call 847-677-4560.

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Kindergarten registration for next year will be held from 2-6 p.m. Wednesday, March 15 and from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Thursday, April 27 at the Educational Service Center, 9440 Kenton Ave. Children must be 5 years old on or before Sept. 1, 2006 in order to enroll for the 2006-07 school year.

Call your neighborhood school: Devonshire (847-676-9280); Highland (847-676-9380); or Jane Stenson (847-967-9380) for more information.