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IN BRIEF is  
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year by  
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*Looking toward the future*

## Planning process yields new initiatives for District 68

Building on its strengths, District 68 has developed a set of initiatives designed to carry it into the future. Beginning in March, the district sought and received input from all the groups with a stake in the educational program: parents and community members, teachers and staff, as well as district administrators.

“Long-range strategic planning is one of the most critical jobs that a school board undertakes,” said Superintendent Frances McTague. “Just this year we have completed addressing some initiatives that came out of our 2001 strategic plan, so it was time to set new long-range goals.” The planning process also gave the board an opportunity to engage with the broader community. Five new members joined the board a year ago.

“We wanted a vital process in which all segments of the community were heard and had a chance to contribute—and that’s what we got,” McTague added.

The district called on ECRA Group, a research and planning consultant, to facilitate the project. To gather information, ECRA conducted surveys, focus groups and interviews with the various constituencies. It also looked at student achievement data and conducted a cur-

riculum audit.

ECRA uses a technique called “triangulation” to analyze objective data, observations and anecdotal reports. It identifies common themes that emerge from the different constituencies and the multiple parts of the study.

The district relied on a steering committee of 28 people to assess the current state of the district, sort through ECRA’s findings and begin drafting a set of strategic initiatives (*see accompanying article on page 2*).

“We had plenty of data to evaluate, but we had dialogue to go with it, and in a process like this dialogue is extremely important,” said Nichole Gross, a seventh-grade language arts teacher and a member of the steering committee. “For everybody, what it ultimately came down to was: what can we do to make this a place where kids can flourish and grow?”

Many of the initiatives came from parents and community members, who said they appreciate the high quality and professionalism of district teachers and administrators. They see value in the small class sizes and the variety of programs that are offered. They also believe that

—Continued on next page

## Initiatives

*Continued from page 1*

one of the district's strengths is its focus on the diversity among students and families.

There are areas within the educational program that can be improved. All constituent groups mentioned the need for ongoing curriculum refinements. A greater focus on multiculturalism and more information for parents about how their children are progressing

in school were highlighted as well.

Looking ahead 10 years, parents and community members said they would like to preserve and build on District 68's strengths—quality teachers, smaller class sizes and a safe environment. However, they think the teaching staff should reflect the diversity of the community.

They would like students to have even more choices within the curriculum and more oppor-

tunity to develop their creativity. They want technology to be up-to-date, but at the same time they think there is value in some old-fashioned approaches to teaching and learning: less reliance on calculators in math, more handwriting and research using books as well as the Internet.

The steering committee communicated its findings to the Board of Education in May. The district will begin implementing the new initiatives in fall 2006.

The strategic planning steering committee has formulated a set of long-range initiatives for District 68 in three areas.

**CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION:** The District 68 curriculum will continue to reflect high academic standards in all subject areas and the curriculum will be implemented to optimize student achievement for students at all levels. The district will:

1. Monitor and refine the recently revised core curriculum.
2. Emphasize the vertical and horizontal articulation of the curriculum and instructional programs within the district, and in the transition from eighth to ninth grade.
3. Emphasize and monitor the needs of special education and/or ESL students within the revised core curriculum.
4. Emphasize the early identification and intervention of academically at-risk students.
5. Assess the degree to which technology is being utilized throughout the curriculum, and then infuse technology into the instructional program as appropriate.
6. Transform student achievement data into useful and applicable information to enhance informed decision-making in curriculum and instruction through a coordinated data management system.

**MULTICULTURALISM:** District 68 will continue to embrace the diverse community within District 68 and increase cultural awareness. The district will:

1. Develop greater understanding of the diverse cultures in the schools and determine how best to meet the needs of the diverse student population in the district.
2. Enhance the diversity within the faculty and staff.
3. Emphasize student awareness of and sensitivity to diversity in District 68.
4. Increase parental involvement in the district in all diverse community groups.

**COMMUNICATIONS:** District 68 will continue to demonstrate open communication among all interest groups. It will:

1. Increase communication between school and home about students' academic progress, behavior, and school events.
2. Emphasize communication opportunities between the district and the community at large, between parents and teachers, between board members and teachers, and between administrators and teachers.
3. Enhance communication and outreach to diverse groups in the school community.
4. Expand technology applications to improve opportunities for communication.

# District MAPs future of student tests

**D**istrict 68 has selected a new test to assess student progress.

The test, Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), from the Northwest Evaluation Association, measures student growth on a regular basis to make sure that curriculum is tailored to student needs while adhering to state and national standards. The new test will be administered twice a year. In combination with the annual ISAT exams and regular classroom assessments, it will provide a comprehensive report of student performance.

MAP analyzes a student's responses to test items and adjusts the difficulty of subsequent items higher or lower as the test is in progress, creating an individualized performance profile

for each student. The resulting profile relates directly to the student's instructional level. Test

*MAP can be used to track how a student progresses over time as the curriculum unfolds from early grades to high school.*

items are aligned with Illinois learning standards and district curriculum.

MAP will replace the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT-9) in District 68 schools. The new tool provides a more accurate assessment of student growth than traditional tests such as the Stanford. MAP can be used to track how a student progresses over time as the curriculum unfolds from early grades to high school.

A Student Assessment Committee chose MAP after a thor-

ough evaluation. The committee has recommended that students in grades 2-5 take MAP tests in

reading and math in September 2006 and again in May 2007. Grades 6 and 7 will take reading, math and science tests at the same times. Eighth-graders will take the MAP assessments in September but not in May; they will take the Explore test for high school placement in the spring.

Teachers will be trained to use the MAP assessments in several sessions starting in August. Parents will receive more information in a letter to be mailed in early September.

## Web site opens direct link to board members

**T**o enhance communication with the Board of Education, the district has added a "Contact the Board" link to its Web site, [www.Skokie68.org](http://www.Skokie68.org).

*Board members may not be able to respond directly to every e-mail message they receive, but will give all correspondence appropriate consideration.*

Clicking on the link will let parents, teachers and community members send an e-mail message that will be routed di-

rectly to all board members. The revised Web site also includes a photo, biographical information and the length of term for each board member. The new features went into effect in mid-May.

Board members may not be able to respond directly to every e-mail message they receive, but will give all correspondence appropriate consideration.

Community members who use this new mechanism should understand that any communication with the school board may become a matter of public record, in accordance

with the Freedom of Information Act. For that reason, and in the interest of privacy, District 68 discourages anyone from using the new e-mail feature to discuss specific students or teachers.

Community members can also leave a voicemail message for the school board president, currently David Beller. The new telephone number is 847-568-7614.

As always, community members can contact the school board by mail, or attend a board meeting and speak during the public comment period.

## IN BRIEF

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## \*ECRWSS\* POSTAL CUSTOMER

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  
Desktop Edit Shop, Inc. Skokie, IL*

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## Summer offers opportunities to learn

Calling all students: Why sleep until noon this summer, or spend your mornings in front of the TV, when you can attend stimulating classes in District 68 summer school?

Choose from a dazzling array of academic enrichment classes, creative arts, sports and hobbies. There also are basic reading and math classes for struggling students (by teacher recommendation only). Some of the most popular courses this year are the Young Scientists Club, Munchees & Movies, the Athletes Club and the summer band program.

Summer school is open to stu-



dents from other districts as well as those from District 68 schools, and a large number of out-of-district students have already signed up.

Summer school starts Monday, June 12. Parents can register their children for summer classes at the District 68 Educational Service Center, 9440 Kenton, through June 7. Students who register between June 8 and June 12 will begin class on June 13.

Most classes will be held at Old Orchard Junior High School. The hour-long sessions begin at 8:30, 9:40 and 10:50 a.m. each day. Students can enroll in as many as three courses. Tuition is \$98 per course hour.

You can download a summer school brochure and registration form at the District 68 Web site—[www.Skokie68.org](http://www.Skokie68.org). For more information, contact the district office at 847-676-9000.