

**DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION**  
**Wilmette Public Schools**

---

**INFORMATION ITEM**

**Date:** January 25, 2021

**To:** Members, Board of Education

**From:** Building Principals  
Grade Level Administrators  
Assistant Principals

Heather Glowacki, Ed.D.  
Assistant Superintendent and Administrator for Human Resources

Tony DeMonte  
Administrator for Technology, Information, & Safety

Katie S. Lee  
Administrator for Curriculum & Instruction

Kristin Swanson, Ph.D.  
Administrator for Student Services

Angela DeMay  
Assistant Director of Special Services

Corey Bultemeier  
Chief School Business Official

**Subject: 2020-2021 Strategic Plan Updates: Annual Business Section**

**INTRODUCTION**

On September 21, 2020, the Board of Education approved the implementation of the 2020-2021 District 39 Strategic Plan. The yearly planning cycle includes Strategic Plan updates. This executive summary report will focus on mid-year updates of the action steps identified under Annual Business. Updates on the Continuing Strategic Initiatives will be presented in February.

## **BUILDING SCHOOL CULTURE AND COMMUNITY**

### ***Background***

District 39 values diversity, equity, and inclusivity and understands the impact school culture has on the development of a deep sense of belonging community-wide -- students, staff, families. District 39's statement of inclusion captures the entirety of this ongoing initiative:

*District 39 believes inclusion plays a vital role in student growth. We are committed to providing a safe and equitable learning environment that fosters a mindset of empathy, respect, and belonging for all District 39 students and staff. By respecting each person's unique identity, perspective, and learning style, we create a stronger community. We honor differences including races and cultures, genders and sexual orientations, abilities and aspirations, identities and affiliations, socioeconomics and worldviews. Embracing diversity prepares our students to thrive in an increasingly complex global community.*

### **Social Emotional Learning**

For the 2020-2021 school year, District 39 has outlined a focus on building a positive and cohesive school community. This is affirmed by our commitment to support the health and well-being of students and staff as part of the return to learning plan. For students, the District has prioritized providing and sustaining a positive school climate by dedicating time in the daily schedule to focus on forging connections and providing targeted Social Emotional instruction. There are embedded daily check-ins between staff and students, both in person and synchronous, to cultivate relationships and support student needs.

In order to inform these practices, universal social and emotional screeners were given to all students; the Mindsets, Essential Skills and Habits (MESH) survey was administered to students in Grades 3-8 for the 2020-2021 school year while the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) was administered to students in Grades PK through Grade 2.

The MESH assessment has two components - social and emotional competencies and school environment. School environment is a composite assessment looking at teacher and student relationships, school safety, school culture and sense of belonging. MESH results indicate that District 39 students continue to have the growth mindset and social and emotional skills necessary for school and life success.

### ***Social and Emotional Competencies***

- For students in grades 3-5, all areas of social and emotional competencies were at or above the 90th percentile nationally with self-management being a particular strength, with collective scores falling at the 99th percentile.
- For students in grades 6-8, students' collective responses indicated that social and emotional skills were well-developed and surpassed national norms -- most domains were at the 90th percentile or greater, with the one exception being social perspective taking, where the District fell at the 80th percentile nationally. Of note were classroom effort and self-management, which both fell at the 99th percentile nationally.

### *School Environment*

- For students in grades 3-5, the results indicate all areas are strengths with composite scores placing Wilmette at or above the 90th percentile nationally. Teacher/student relationships and sense of belonging were areas of notable strength, both falling at the 99th percentile when compared to national norms. Also noteworthy was that the area of teacher and student relationships has increased seven percent since the spring assessment was administered.
- For students in grades 6-8, teacher and student relationships and school safety were strengths with comprehensive scores falling at the 90th and 99 percentiles respectively. School climate and sense of belonging both fell in the average range of achievement nationally, and are areas identified for further investigation and needed growth, as scores on those domains fell in the 70th and 50th percentiles respectively.

The DESSA is an assessment taken by teachers as they reflect on their grades PK-2 students' unique patterns of strengths and areas of need. The DESSA is meant to screen students who may be in need of further social and emotional instruction.

- Results on the DESSA indicate that 38 percent of students fall in the strength category of performance, 59 percent fall in the typical range while 3 percent were identified as having social and emotional needs.
- It should be noted that many of these students identified were already in receipt of social and emotional interventions.

### *Staff Professional Development*

District 39 is focused on promoting and supporting skill development for both students and staff in the five domains/competencies of social emotional learning as defined by the Collaborative for Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) including self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, relationship skills and social awareness. In addition, staff continues to identify and support diversity, equity and inclusion across all educational environments. This work began with the development of a skill matrix to identify those competencies which will ensure students receive purposeful instruction around how to be “productive citizens of a global society” as outlined in the District mission statement.

As a continuation of efforts to support all students' social and emotional needs, a core group of educators took part in a New Trier Township CASEL training series over the summer in order to help grow adult social and emotional learning competencies. Additionally, a group of staff has been provided professional development related to restorative practices in order to create more inclusive school and classroom environments. The district Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Committee is currently making plans to train a third group on the Responsive Classroom methodology in order to garner strategies that will further facilitate a sense of community in each respective classroom.

### *Social Emotional Learning Committee*

To further ensure that District 39 can meet our SEL goals for students and staff, the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Committee has undertaken the task of building an instructional resource for teachers and staff to support skill building in the SEL competencies. This resource will include learning progressions, grade level outcomes, and lessons to guide the specific

instruction of the competencies, while offering ways to embed competency development into everyday instructional practices. The committee is also examining current practices in order to determine how core teams will communicate with staff surrounding identifying and providing to meet building and individual needs and to plan for related, relevant professional development.

In a continued effort to create a culture of empathy and help students develop the social-emotional competencies needed for both school and lifelong success, aligned with the District's commitment for inclusive practices, the areas of diversity and equity are also being supported through the work of the Social Emotional Committee. The committee recently worked to specifically identify how to support student and staff social and emotional needs during the pandemic when stress and emotions may present differently than in a typical school year.

### **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity (DEI) Efforts**

Administrators, staff, and students have added to the list of accomplishments under District 39's "Building School Culture and Community" initiative outlined in past Strategic Plans and board reports. For example, members of District 39 have/will:

- Engaged in summer learning around diversity, identity, and race organized by colleagues by choice (i.e. book talks/clubs).
- Organized Unity Day on October 21, 2020. On this day, members of each school community wore orange as a symbolic representation of showing that District 39 stands together against bullying because we are united around kindness, acceptance, and inclusion. They also participated in Kindness Day on November 13, 2020.
- Formed groups/committee focused on ensuring action items are aligned with beliefs such as adding more books and other resources that represent the diverse populations of the world, sharing teaching/learning resources that can be used by teachers and students, and continuing the conversations around identity/race, equity, and human rights.
- Participated in ADL's Walk Against Hate on October 18, 2020. Highcrest Middle and Wilmette Junior High School's administrators, staff, students, and families united in their fight against hate, and the pursuit of justice and fair treatment for all.
- Engaged in learning how to navigate conversations around diversity, equity, and inclusivity-- among adults and among students -- through guidance gleaned from a variety of resources (including those from Teaching Tolerance, Facing History and Ourselves, ADL). This is ongoing work as this skill requires development and practice so that it is not what we simply do but rather a part of who we are.
- Meet to articulate/and share ideas township wide and also with community organizations such as Healing Everyday Racism in Our Schools (HEROS).
- Dedicated the upcoming February Institute Day to the work of DEI and engaging staff in learning, conversations, and collaboration around anti-bias education. This day will lead with a keynote address from Douglas Reeves, author of more than 40 books and 100 articles on education/leadership and twice named to the Harvard University Distinguished Authors Series. His keynote will be based on his newest book about challenging conversations around race.

A prime example of District 39's end goal is encapsulated in this summary of events that were initiated by a group of Wilmette Junior High School students. In November, a group of students sent 8th Grade Level Administrator (GLAd), Eric Resis, a letter advocating for education around

racial and gender slurs, and overall inclusion of others. Principal Kate Dominique and GLAd Eric Resis met with the students to discuss and understand what they would like to achieve. The second meeting was led by Bill Hicks, ADL liaison for “No Place for Hate”. The students agreed that becoming a "No Place for Hate" designated school, and the workshops and educational opportunities that come with it, would be a great place to start. These students have collaborated with the school leaders and Bill Hicks to adapt ADL’s "No Place for Hate" student survey. They also created a video introducing the survey and articulating the intent of gathering information. The hope is that this survey will encourage both 7th and 8th grade students to join them in forming a committee that will work with Bill Hicks to implement workshops for advisory classes and as a result become a “legit ‘No Place for Hate’” designated school. These students believe that it is an annual, ongoing commitment and not a checkbox to mark; “We have to prove every year that our fight against hate continues.”

And finally, Wilmette District 39 Board of Education, not only supported and endorsed the district’s mission and statement of inclusion but also committed to engage in reflective learning this year through a book study focused on racial literacy. This punctuates District 39’s belief and commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusivity -- important ongoing work focused on the collective growth of all.

### **Family/Community Engagement Efforts**

As in years past, District 39 has continued to host and offer educational presentations and events to engage families and residents of the community. Tony DeMonte, Administrator for Technology, Information, & Safety, has partnered with Family Service Center and other community/district members to plan and deliver these well-attended events.

Here are the events that have been offered and will be offered this year:

- Building Resilience During a Pandemic (9/2/20)
- Parenting During COVID-19: Supporting Adjustment at Home and at School (9/22/20)
- Whole Brain Child Approach: Strategies for Effective parenting During Highly Emotional Times (10/20/20)
- Supporting Physical Health in a Digital World (10/28/20)
- Anxiety and Growth Mindset: Helping Kids Cope with Challenges and Setbacks (11/10/20)
- Stress Management: Helping Kids Cope with Stress (12/8/20)
- Developmental Expectations: Helping Kids Increase Competency and Independence (1/27/21)
- Social Relationships: Helping Kids Navigate Friendships and Groups (2/16/21)
- Parenting in a Digital Age (3/10/21)
- App Tasting: Quick Demonstrations of Apps Kids are Using (4/14/21)

All are welcome to participate and registration can be accessed through the 2020-2021 District 39 Family Toolbox under “Parent Events”. For events that have already occurred, recordings of the webinar are posted for viewing at any time.

## **SCHOOL SAFETY**

### ***Background***

The State of Illinois requires school districts to review school safety plans annually. In efforts to continuously improve security and safety in District 39, a security review process was established categorizing priorities in phases for implementation during 2017-2018 school year. As a result, security measures are revisited and projects are identified, as needed, every school year. In addition, District 39 regularly collaborates with the Wilmette Police Department (WPD) and Wilmette Fire Department (WFD).

District 39 identified, planned, and completed many security projects last school year:

- Additional security cameras were installed at Wilmette Junior High School.
- District 39 gymnasiums were outfitted with stereo speakers to improve clarity of sound required.
- Stop the Bleed, a national awareness/call-to-action campaign, was initiated with training provided by the Wilmette Police Department on how to help in a bleeding emergency until professional help arrives. Stop the Bleed kits were donated by the Wilmette Optimist Club and North Cook Intermediate Service Center, and placed in all schools as well as the Mikaelian Education Center.
- District 39's Crisis Plan language was reviewed, updated, and shared with staff. The abridged format allows for future updates to be made immediately. For example, last year, District 39 worked in conjunction with the Wilmette Police Department to identify a reunification site in the event of an emergency.

### ***2020-2021 School Year***

This year, administration identified and budgeted for the following security projects as a continuation of the 2019-2020 projects with one additional item:

1. Installing additional security cameras at all schools.
2. Install public announcement (PA) speakers in WJHS stairwells.
3. Provide additional "Stop the Bleed" kits and mount in hallways for easy access.
4. Provide reunification kits, training and communication.
5. Continue to evaluate replacement of door locking mechanisms for large space areas.

Due to COVID-19 related health and safety measures taking top priority this fall, projects were placed on hold. These projects will begin during second semester and will continue until completed during the summer. Ensuring the safety and security of students and staff in District 39 is a primary and ongoing goal.

## **GRADES K-8 SCIENCE CURRICULUM REVIEW**

### ***Background***

While implementing the established science curriculum, Grades K-8 Science Curriculum Review was initiated in 2018-2019 school year with a two-year developing phase. The review process involves a reflection on current units of study, an evaluation of standards alignment, and identification of curricular resources required to support teaching and learning. At that time, the newly released Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) suggested a shift in science

education from “learning about” science to “figuring out” science with close attention to the engagement of students in phenomenon investigations while incorporating a variety of learning modalities, inquiry, and argumentation.

The 2020-2021 school year marked the first year of the implementation phase of the revised curricula. The goals were to teach using the adopted curriculum materials -- Elevate Science for elementary (K-4) and Amplify Science for middle/upper elementary (grades 5-8) -- and conduct ongoing discussions to gather feedback that would be used to guide any updates/revisions to District 39 curriculum maps.

#### *Elementary Update*

NGSS aligned teaching and learning is underway. However, the planned use of Elevate Science curricular resources for elementary schools had to be postponed due to the restrictions placed on student interaction by classroom social distancing requirements and remote learning. Elevate Science lessons are structured so that students work together in groups and share materials which has not been possible this year. Instead, grades K-4 have been using Generation Genius as a teaching resource which better matches the requirements of remote and in-person instruction. Its online structure brings the science standards to life by pairing engaging videos with reading material, activities, and quiz games.

This year, elementary teachers have become more familiar with the Next Generation Science Standards for their grade levels which is preparing them for more in-depth study of these topics when they begin using Elevate Science next year. Generation Genius will continue to be used as a supplement to Elevate Science due to the added benefit of its online platform - a need that has surfaced and a lesson learned due to this unique school year.

#### *Middle/Upper Elementary Update*

NGSS aligned teaching and learning is also underway. The planned use of Amplify Science curricular resources for grades 5-8 is in progress with a few modifications necessary due to the restrictions placed on student interaction by classroom social distancing requirements and remote learning. Ongoing discussions and reflections are shared among teachers and the Department of Curriculum and Instruction during grade level meetings, collaboration/planning sessions, and/or teacher surveys.

For example, teachers have indicated an overall satisfaction with the curricular resources and learning experiences provided through Amplify Science citing the regular use of the instructional materials provided. This indicates that Amplify Science is meeting their needs in regards to lesson design and delivery. In particular, several have noted that the online simulations demonstrate science concepts well and the writing-based questions require students to build and express their understanding in argument form. As always, the teachers tweak and modify as necessary to meet the needs of students. Many have found the need to modify assessment questions to challenge students’ depth of knowledge or alter the delivery format to make it more “student friendly”. Finally, teachers have shared that although there is a learning management system (student portal) embedded in Amplify’s digital platform, they are using Schoology for consistency and ease for students. The curriculum review committee members will meet in the spring/summer to complete the review process using the gathered information.

## **SUSTAINABILITY PLANNING, PRACTICES, AND EDUCATION**

### ***Construction Projects***

District 39 continually seeks to ensure positive environmental practices during construction projects through the use of sustainable materials, grant funding applications, and cost analysis. Past addition/renovation projects undertaken by District 39 were designed to meet and/or exceed rigorous energy codes and standards and all future design processes will follow suit as well. STR Partners is aware of the district's commitment to positive environmental practices for any and all construction projects (i.e. Romona and McKenzie construction, if approved). This commitment extends to all types of projects like the installation of air conditioning at Wilmette Junior High School. The project at Wilmette Junior High School will include some life safety electrical work that is partially funded by a state maintenance grant. In addition, STR Partners continues to review the status of grants available at this time for construction and energy conservation.

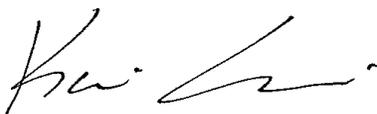
### ***Sustainability Practices & Education***

District 39 has a long standing commitment to sustainability and green practices are institutionalized throughout the district. Specific to this unique school year, students and staff continue recycling efforts -- paper, aluminum, and plastic. Admittedly, other practices have been more challenging as adjustments/accommodations were made to adhere to health and safety protocols. For example, school cafeterias individually package lunches in boxes for in-person learners. In efforts to minimize sharing of items, condiments are provided in single use packets which inevitably produces more waste relative to when they were available in shareable containers in the cafeteria. Also, composting stations have been paused this year since students eat in their respective classrooms.

## **CONCLUSION**

District 39 administrators and staff have worked diligently toward achieving the goals and/or outcomes of the 2020-2021 Strategic Plan. The Board will be presented updates on the Continuing Strategic Initiatives in February. The Board of Education may expect a full Strategic Plan review in June.

**Recommended for presentation to the Board of Education,**



---

**Kari Cremascoli, Ph.D., Superintendent**