



In This Issue

Letter from Dr. Mical	1
<i>School Reports</i>	
Holmes: Community Teamwork	1
Riley: IIM	2
Frost: Flying Falcons	2
Poe: Power of Teaming	2
Field: MEMC	3
Longfellow: Celebration of Learning	3
Kilmer: Homework Club	4
London: Integrated Instruction	5
Twain: Focus on Family Literacy	6
Food Service Survey	6
Cooper: Extended Learning Program	7
Tarkington: Reading Skills Improve	7
Whitman: Service Learning Project	8
Early Childhood Program	8



Letter from Dr. Gary Mical

# Celebrating Success Throughout the District

This issue of The Author chronicles some of the wonderful things that are happening in District 21. Our commitment to Professional Learning Communities began in 2003 with the aim of increasing student achievement by developing shared goals and working collaboratively with all members of our learning community both within and beyond the school buildings.

The Professional Learning Communities in each school are focusing on continual improvement and seeing results. In this issue, you will read about programs such as the Integrated Instruction at Jack London Middle School, where teachers create a rich environment by team-teaching topics and enhancing them with real-world associations. Longfellow School's Celebration of Learning has grown into an exciting event where more than 200 students explore independent study projects and then share them. The Extended Learning Program at Cooper Middle School helps students with special needs and regular education students to learn from each other. Riley School's Independent Investigation Method guides students through a seven-step research model where students truly take charge of their own learning. The Professional Learning Community in Tarkington School is implementing school-wide reading skills improvement strategies and seeing positive growth. Poe School is using the power of teaming to increase

student success.

The vigorous connections our district continues to develop as we reach out to include families and the larger community reinforces our educational goals. Twain School's Focus on Family Literacy has expanded in its second year to include monthly explorations of the Indian Trails Library. Holmes Middle School connects through its active Latino Parents Advisory Council, and Saturday morning classes for parents that incorporate the entire family in the process of life-long learning. Walt Whitman School has built a foundation of service learning to connect students to their local and global communities. This issue also highlights the after-school enhancement programs growing at Kilmer, Field and Frost Schools which are fueled by volunteer tutors.

The Professional Learning Community Framework supports our students to achieve academic excellence and take responsibility for their own life-long learning. The framework encourages students to participate in their learning community through both academic and co-curricular activities. No small part of this process is taking time to celebrate our successes. This issue is dedicated to honoring progress in every school in our district – an accomplishment of which our entire community can be proud.

*The Professional Learning Community Framework supports our students to achieve academic excellence and take responsibility for their own life-long learning.*



## Holmes Middle School Community Teamwork Provides Resources To Parents

The Latino Parents Advisory Council has been very active at Holmes Middle School. Ongoing monthly meetings offer a forum where parents can discuss issues that are important to their community. Most recently the topic was the challenge of raising adolescents in the U.S.

This year, Holmes is also offering Saturday morning classes for parents twice a month in computer skills and English as a Second Language. "It's an honor for me to be working with this group and seeing how much they want to be involved in their children's education," says Assistant Principal Jose Celis. "It's a lot of fun to see everyone working together and learning together. This really embodies the goal of being a life-long learner."

"With the help of Gregg Crocker, our Community Service Education Coordinator, we also added field trips this year," says Celis. "A family field trip was scheduled for December 16 to the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago. When I called the museum, they initially said it would be \$10 a ticket, but someone in their education department let us in for free. That's a huge burden off a lot of the parents. We studied their website during computer classes to expand the learning opportunity."

Holmes Middle School is also working with organizations like the Wheeling Park District and OMNI Youth Services. "We want to work as a team with Wheeling to provide resources for our parents," Celis says. "It's great to see the community working together."





## Riley Elementary

# Independent Investigation Method (IIM)

Last year Riley Elementary piloted the Independent Investigation Method with the Second Grade Team. This year, IIM is building-wide. “Our library media specialist learned about it,” explains Principal Carrie McCulley. “It guides students through a seven-step research model: topic selection, goal setting, research, organizing material, goal evaluation, product (such as a book, poster or play), and presentation of that product.”

IIM was a tremendous success with the second grade. “It was so incredible,” says McCulley. “I had seven-year-olds telling me what plagiarism is, and they could recite the resources they used.”

The entire staff worked in grade-level teams with a consultant to learn the technique, and each grade level committed to doing a unit using this research model. “It is great to have the whole

building invested in this process,” McCulley says. “It sends the message that we are all researchers.”

The program is based on the skill level of each student. The kindergarten classes are researching the Riley school community, interviewing different members of the community like the secretary or custodian. Younger students work in groups, but by fifth grade, the projects can be individually researched. The students are actively involved in their own learning. When a teacher provides guiding questions, the students can add what they want to know to the concept map. “They are learning how to research and organize information,” McCulley says. “It takes them to a higher thinking level where each student is involved.”



## Frost Elementary

# Flying Falcons Expands

Flying Falcons, Frost’s after-school tutoring program, has almost doubled its services in the last three years. Working in conjunction with Harper College in Palatine, college students studying child development have been paired with Frost students after school. Last year the program was expanded to include tutoring in groups of four to six for students who have academic issues but don’t necessarily need the emotional-social benefits of an individual tutor. Classroom teachers work with groups to build specific skill sets.

“The teaching staff wanted more individuals and more groups involved,” says Principal Rick Herrejon. “Because the first and second-grade teachers need a different program, we are serving them on Mondays and Wednesdays, and most work in small groups to bring their skills up to

grade level. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, the third through fifth graders work in small groups and with tutors.”

“Michelle Zelm, who runs the program, has helped find more tutors to meet the growing need. We now have about 150 students participating over the four days with up to 90 Harper College tutors and also National Honor Society Members from Wheeling and Glenbrook North High Schools.”

“We want to expand the enrichment possibilities,” says Herrejon. “We tried a bucket band through the Flying Falcon program. We are considering a fifth-grade play, which would rehearse through Flying Falcon. We want to serve as many needs as we can through this vehicle. In an ideal situation, every student at one point or another would be a Flying Falcon.”

## Poe Elementary

# The Power of Teaming



“When you look at a school, you are looking at a number of communities – grade level communities, special area communities,” says Principal Pam Lindberg. What drives these communities is collaborative teaming. “We use teams to look at new educational strategies and share them with the entire staff.”

“We are focusing on student success through our team efforts. The teachers write grade-level target goals together that match the district goals, and monitor student progress throughout the year.”

“The other side of teaming is the social/emotional piece,” Lindberg continues, “We do grade-level team service projects and whole school team-building efforts throughout the year.”

Poe teachers meet at least once a week to make these plans and reflect on how the kids are doing.

“I meet with the teachers regularly, and we check in on how they are meeting the needs of their kids, and what kind of support and assistance they need. We also celebrate with the kids about what they have accomplished.”

Lindberg says, “The District has provided staff planning time. This is a plus. The message from the District office is that teaming is valuable.”

“I’ve told the teams, the good news is you can work more successfully as a collaborative team. The bad news is that this is a journey without an end. We will never say we’ve got it, and we are done,” says Lindberg. “We are continually learning with one another and from one another, and that transfers into helping kids be more successful.”

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*In an ideal situation, every student at one point or another would be a Flying Falcon.*

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## Field Elementary

# Making Every Moment Count

MEMC, called Memsee by students and staff, provides opportunities for students to develop the academic and life skills they need. The after-school program, staffed with certified teachers and supplemented with high school volunteers, meets twice a week.

“Students learn to work collaboratively and act respectfully towards each other,” explains Field Principal LaVonne Knapstein. “Students learn to take responsibility for their own learning – that’s a big piece. It’s a large task, but the sooner they begin, the better it is for them.”

MEMC has three strands: 1. Academic Support, which provides tutoring for students who haven’t met the government and district learning standards. 2. Guided Study for students who don’t qualify for the more intense tutoring

program. 3. Healthy Habits, which include intramural sports and learning centers such as a cooking center focused on nutrition.

“The bottom line,” Knapstein says, “is that we have made substantial gains on the annual yearly school report card, and MEMC is part of the reason. It helps students approach learning in a successful way.”

Teachers recommend students for Academic Support. Guided Study and Healthy Habits are open to all children in the school. “A lot of kids want to do the intramural segment,” says Knapstein, “but to participate in Healthy Habits, they must sign up for Guided Study as well. MEMC covers a lot of needs for many different students no matter where they are at.”



## Longfellow Elementary

# A Celebration of Learning

This January’s Celebration of Learning has its roots in the mid 1980s when teacher Pat Kopp and principal Bob White decided to expand the standard science fair into a more broad-based experience. Longfellow’s Celebration of Learning has grown into an exciting event in which more than 200 first- through fifth-graders do independent study projects and create reports, digital displays and exhibits to share with their school and community.

“You see science fairs in middle and high school,” says Longfellow Principal Debby Serbin. “But to have this kind of in-depth interest and research in an elementary school is very positive. When you encourage children to follow their dreams, you never know where something like this will lead.”

Most of the work is done outside the school setting. “We are hoping they will use the skills they have learned in school,” says Serbin. “If they need coaching and support, we are available.” Students select a topic that matters to them. Students are asked to anchor their projects on a central question, such as ‘What was the Underground Railroad?’ or ‘How did the Civil War affect Illinois?’ Volcanoes are popular, as well as music and optical illusions. Sports are a consistent favorite, as well as medical issues from the students’ families.

“We have moved away from judging in favor of feedback,” Serbin says. “We give the children a chance to share their presentation with interested adults who ask them questions about how they can explore further.”





# Joyce Kilmer Elementary Both Students and Tutors Look Forward to Homework Club



Homework Club, which meets after school on Tuesdays and Thursdays at Kilmer, is in its second year. “We invite the kids who are most in need of help with reading and math homework,” explains Kilmer Principal Kim Zinman. “We have about 40 students and 40 volunteer tutors from Buffalo Grove High School, Kingswood Church and the community, so at least one day a week the students get one-on-one with a tutor. They absolutely love it.”

Small groups also study with certified teachers from District 21. The students come in and have a snack. At 3:45 they are assigned to tutors or the homework club room. At 4:45 they switch to activities such as gym, crafts or games till 5:30.

“The tutors are just as excited as the kids,” Zinman says. “A couple of our former students who tutored last year have recruited their friends. Some of them start because they need community service hours, but they often go beyond their hours. They say, ‘I have to be here. My kids need me.’ They can see how much the kids love it. I also get calls from the community, and we hope that will continue. If we have more volunteers, we can expand.”

“When we looked at test scores, grades and work habits of the students last year, these kids did make gains,” Zinman says. “We have teachers who say that after being in homework club, their students have become more responsible knowing that they are getting more done and seeing themselves grow. That’s the part that just warms your heart.”





# Jack London Middle School Integrated Instruction Teaches Concepts as Well as Content

Since London Middle School opened, its teachers have created a richer environment for learning through integrated instruction. For example, the eighth graders study the novel *The Giver* by Lois Lowry, which explores the theme of utopian societies. “This challenges the kids to think about what makes a perfect society,”

says London Principal Jim Parker. “What about our society? Could it be better? When the students go to social studies class and the teacher is discussing the constitution, students can make solid connections to what they have learned in reading class.”

When the sixth graders study ancient civilizations, they may look at the Greeks and Native Americans to

explore what traits are necessary for civilization. Then they take a walk in the neighborhood to find evidence of systems and patterns in our society such as transportation and communication. Now in writing class, they may write about what they have learned in social studies. The science teacher might say, “I know you studied Mesopotamia in social studies class. Now, let’s talk about a desert biome. Why do you think they lived by the rivers?” This helps students understand how climate affects civilization, and how we survive in a variety of settings.

“The students make connections more easily when they continue with the same topic in different classes,” says Learning Coach Cynthia Doyle-Notzen. “Often we team teach a concept, which gives us so many things we can pull from to make those real-world associations for the students.”



Please  
complete our  
Food  
Service  
Survey  
...on the other side!





# Food Service Survey

District 21 is continually evaluating its food service program in an effort to provide your child with the best possible service and quality of food. Please take a few minutes to talk with your child about their lunch experiences and complete the questions below. The information that you provide will be used to help us evaluate our performance and focus on areas of concern. This survey can be returned to your child’s teacher, faxed to 847-520-2710, or completed on the district website at [www.ccsd21.org](http://www.ccsd21.org). Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

School\_\_\_\_\_

Grade\_\_\_\_\_

1. How often does your child purchase lunch?

☐ Almost every day (skip question 2)

☐ A few times each week

☐ Hardly ever

☐ Depends on the menu for the day

☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_
2. My child does not buy lunch because:

☐ They do not like the food served

☐ I find that it is more economical to send lunch from home

☐ They prefer the food they bring from home so they can choose what they want to eat

☐ I have better control over what my child is eating

☐ The lunch lines are too long

☐ Other\_\_\_\_\_
3. Overall my child:

☐ Seems happy with the quality and quantity of food

☐ Occasionally complains about the quality and quantity of food

☐ Often complains about the quality and quantity of food

☐ Never comments about the quality and quantity of food
4. Overall my child:

☐ Seems happy with the cafeteria staff

☐ Occasionally complains about the cafeteria staff

☐ Often complains about the cafeteria staff

☐ Never comments about the cafeteria staff
5. The computerized point of sale system used to track my child’s lunch account:

☐ Has made paying for lunch easier

☐ Has made paying for lunch more difficult

☐ Has made keeping track of my child’s lunch money easier

☐ Has made keeping track of my child’s lunch money more difficult

☐ No change
6. I/my child would like to see the following items added to the menu:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Other suggestions or comments (please leave a phone number or email address if you wish to be contacted).

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Please use the space below if your child purchases breakfast and you would like to add comments or suggestions.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Clip off at line



## Twain Elementary Focus on Family Literacy Expands to Include Indian Trails Library

Focus on Family Literacy at Twain Elementary School has expanded in its second year. The family field trip on Columbus Day to the Shedd Aquarium took four busses this year. “The idea,” explained Principal Gwendolyn Gage, is to help parents see what is available for family outings and how it can build the children’s world knowledge base. The number of people involved is growing because they find these trips so educationally supportive.”

Twains Parents as Leaders Program, where parents come to school to build educational skills while their children benefit from programs directed by the Wheeling Park District, was so well received last year that it is being doubled this year.

New this year are monthly visits to the Indian Trails Library. Pat Salvetti of ELL Resource works closely with Reva Kaplan at Indian Trails Library. “Pat sends out flyers, the teachers tell their students, and they come to the library with their parents, older brothers and sisters, preschoolers – the whole family comes,” says Kaplan. “The first visit, they were given a tour of the library and shown how to get a library card. Many parents come from places where they did not have a library. Our goal is to get people acclimated so they can come and explore and feel this is their library.”

“Kathy Simonetta and I coordinate monthly visits,” says Salvetti. “I have a bilingual teacher working with me as well. If I can get the parents comfortable, then hopefully, the library visits become part of their family activity. I am hoping to coordinate with the library summer reading program.”





## Cooper Middle School

# Extended Learning Program

Students in Cooper’s Extended Learning Program take full part in school life. “These students represent a full range of needs including physical and cognitive,” explains Assistant Principal Michael Shapiro. “They are a central part of our school community. One of the goals of our school community is that we all learn from each other. These kids come to school with such a desire to learn. They are some of the brightest-eyed kids in the building. They learn from every adult and student they come in contact with, and everyone learns from them.”

Because of the flexibility of the Extended Learning Program, each student participates at their academic level, moving between self-contained learning classes and joining mainstream classes for physical education, art, technology and

any other subjects that are appropriate, including co-curricular activities such as cheerleading and the Mural Club. They have a diverse day, as all students do at Cooper.”

Regular community field trips help Extended Learning Program students apply what they have learned in the classroom to a real-life setting,” says Shapiro. “They might visit Jewel Food Store to learn about the inner workings of a grocery store or fill their own supply list for the classroom. Students also build a practical skill set that they can take with them by working with the office staff on projects like collecting attendance and collating flyers. Their teacher does an excellent job of connecting their education to their lives and to their future.”

## Tarkington Elementary

# Reading Skills Improve

Tarkington School’s staff has made improved reading skills their focus for this year. “Reading is one of the keys to being successful,” explains Principal John Patti. “The earlier we bring kids up to grade level, the better they will do as they move on through the educational system. I’m really pleased with all the approaches our teachers are running with.”

“PALS, Peer Assisted Literacy Strategies, has produced excellent growth by focusing on phonics and whole language with first graders using the technique of read, predict and retell. We are also matching small groups of at-risk first graders with parent volunteers. STRIPES, a reading support group, pairs selected students with high school mentors twice a week.”

Struggling second-grade readers are doing multiple readings of a text to improve their flu-

ency. They time themselves daily and can chart their own progress. Students in third grade who are having trouble with comprehension are being targeted for direct instruction. Vocabulary development techniques in all grade levels have been developed from a staff book study.

“The entire staff is studying the book Reading with Meaning by Debbie Miller, which focuses on explicit reading strategies,” Patti says. “We are implementing this schoolwide. We are working on this at monthly meetings and district in-service days.”

“We are seeing positive growth in all these areas,” says Patti. “The results we saw last year, particularly with our second-language learners, were very good.”





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website www.ccsd21.org

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**Hawthorne School  
Early Childhood Program**

The district has continued its emphasis on program evaluation through the Professional Learning Community Framework. The Early Childhood program review included a historical perspective, an overview of the program, a literature review regarding the effectiveness of preschool education, state and local student achievement data, and financial considerations. In addition, visits to preschool programs in neighboring school districts were conducted. Parent Focus Groups were also facilitated to discuss the strengths and areas for improvement of the current program.

"Overall, District 21's Early Childhood Program is of high quality as stringent federal standards have been met," said Assistant Superintendent Char Cieply. Parental response was positive and the visits to neighboring districts affirmed the excellence of our program. Because continuous improvement is a hallmark of a Professional Learning Community, the preschool staff is prepared to address the changes that need to be made within the program as well as celebrate its accomplishments.

One of District 21's projects is to modify report cards. Therefore, we are seeking parent volunteers to provide input into the reporting system that the district will adopt. If you are interested in participating in this one-time parent focus group, please contact Claudia Bowen at 847-520-2730 with your name, phone number, and the school(s) your children attend. We will be meeting at the Administration Building, 999 W. Dundee Road, Wheeling, on April 24 from 7-8 p.m. Thank you in advance for your consideration.



Walt Whitman Elementary

A Foundation of Service Learning

Honoring the soldiers who are serving their country became a service-learning project at Whitman Elementary that included the entire school. After Veterans' Day, the whole school plugged into Operation Uplink. Uplink is sponsored by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States. It keeps military personnel and hospitalized veterans in touch with their families and loved ones by providing them with a free phone card. Using donations from individuals and groups, like Whitman School, Operation Uplink purchases phone cards and distributes them to servicemen and

women who are separated from those they care about.

"Every classroom had a can for collecting spare

change," says Whitman Principal Ralph Cook. "We asked the students and their families to donate what they could. We collected over \$1,000. We are in awe of their dedication. We invited a veteran to come for a presentation."

Whitman School has a history of service. "We've done canned food drives and collected coats," Cook says. "When Grand Forks was flooded, we did a school-wide garage sale/auction to help those families."

"I think service learning is huge," says Cook. "It gives students a sense of global sharing. We have done a lot as a district with service projects. It brings the whole community together, and this takes it the next step – extending the reach of our classroom into the world."

