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Letter from Dr. Gary Mical

# Successes Continue Throughout the District

This spring's edition of The Author is a celebration of what takes place in classrooms throughout District 21 every day. We have selected one program from each school in our district — from our Hawthorne Early Childhood Center through our middle schools — to represent the broad assortment of educational programs that our community can take pride in.

Whether we are talking about the score-boosting After-School Stripes Program at Tarkington Elementary School, London Middle School's Answer the Call Scholarship Program, or the Dance Club created in response to student requests at Whitman Elementary School, we want to share some of the wonderful activities taking place for students in our school district.

I encourage parents and all community members to read each one of these articles highlighting programs that are happening in our schools. In a time of dark headlines, we welcome the chance to share some of District 21's successful and ongoing efforts to keep the future bright for our students. In these articles, you will find inspiring examples of our dedicated staff's hard work to continue creating opportunities for our students that will expand their horizons.

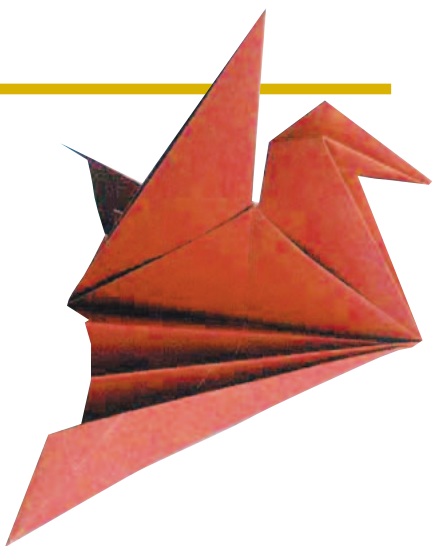
*Gay E. Mical*

*We want to share some of the wonderful activities taking place for students in our school district*



# Learning Flows Both Ways

*They really do become buddies*



Learning flows both ways when Poe School partners with nearby Chicago Futabakai Japanese School. The connection has been in place for two years with a Poe first-grade class and the Futabakai first graders visiting each other’s schools twice during the school year. “Seeing how a Japanese school operates is eye opening for our staff and parents,” says Poe Elementary Co-Principal Ralph Cook.

“It’s a great educational opportunity. They teach our students skills like origami and drawing,” says Poe Co-Principal Pam Lindberg. “The Poe classroom teacher works with P.E. and music teachers to create our program. We have shared cultural traditions like Thanksgiving, Halloween and Valentines Day with them. They also exchange and play games.”

“They really do become buddies after a cautious start when they are paired for the

year,” says Lindberg. “By the second meeting, they are thrilled to see their buddy again. They seem to light up when they are together.”

Poe has also hosted Futabakai teachers who wanted to learn more about our kindergarten and special education programs. “After a morning in the classroom, they met with some of our teachers to respond and reflect about their observations and asked questions. These ideas will be taken back to the Japanese Council in Chicago and possibly to Japan.”

Lindberg called the partnership a valuable learning experience for teachers, parents and administrators. “It builds community relationships, and the number one area of pride for me is seeing the enthusiasm and learning that takes place between the students.”

## Tarkington Elementary

# After School Stripes Boosts Scores

Tarkington’s After School Stripes Program targets third and fifth grade students who need just a little more help to meet or exceed requirements on the Illinois State Achievement Test (ISAT). “The program is aimed at those students who are close, and if they have an extra boost of assistance, they may meet the ISAT requirements,” says Tarkington Elementary Principal Joe Arduino.

Using the previous year’s test scores, staff identified 27 students, who were then enrolled in After School Stripes two days a week for about four months. The program is staffed by volunteer high school and college students, including many former Tarkington students who want to go into

teaching careers. The volunteers work one-on-one with the students, using a program called Ladder to Success.

“We don’t teach to the test,” Arduino says. “We are helping these kids to be better readers, and then they also do better on the test. When they were tested last spring 78 percent were at or exceeded ISAT requirements.

“We were thrilled with the data,” says Arduino. “We’ve expanded the program this year to include targeted English Language Learners with bilingual tutors and bilingual staff.

The hour-long program includes a snack and an opportunity to get their homework done. “When students get home, they don’t have homework because they completed it with their tutor. It helps monitor their work, and the kids don’t feel overburdened,” Arduino says. “The one-on-one format is ideal. When you are working with reading, it’s a luxury that I’m glad we have.”

## Riley Elementary

# Hog-wild over Reading

Whatever it takes to inspire a love of reading in her students, Riley Elementary Principal Carrie McCulley is ready. “We do a summer reading program, and last summer’s theme was ‘Go Hog-wild and Read,’ McCulley says. “When the kids came back to school in the fall, we challenged them to read 150,000 minutes in four weeks, and if we reached our goal, I promised to kiss a pig.” Students get reading time in the library every week, and they participate in a reading at home (RAH) program where they have their weekly RAH minutes signed by

their parents. Each class has its own incentives, but the biggest motivator this fall was the Pig-o-meter.

“Everywhere I went, students were telling me how many minutes they read,” says McCulley. “It was a great way to get everyone back to school and so involved in reading.” The students shot past the reading challenge and ended up with 207,140 minutes of reading by their deadline. Every October, Riley Elementary invites an author to continue the reading theme from the summer. This year they chose poet, teacher and author Kallie Dakos, author of Our Principal Promised to Kiss a Pig. “The week before she came, our teachers read the book to their kids to heighten the excitement,” McCulley says.

During the author visit, McCulley kissed a pot-bellied pig named Sam. “The kids are still talking about it, and asking what I will kiss next year,” she says. “It’s going to be a hard act to follow, but we will plan something to top this.”







Whitman Elementary

## Whitman Students Create Dance Club

Whitman Dance Club grew out of a dance demonstration that second-grade bilingual teacher Erin Schlenger and a friend presented at a PTO-sponsored family event. Some of the students who saw the dancing wanted to learn.

“The students were inspired and motivated,” says Schlenger. “They approached our principal, and she told them to write a proposal. We sat down together and wrote a rough draft, then the students organized all the details. They started the club and they’re having a great time. They are practicing on the playground in the morning and again at lunch. We’ll have a performance in April as part of the school music recital, and they are very excited to perform what they have learned.”

Whitman Principal Lori Henkels sees many

benefits. “We have both bilingual and monolingual students, and both boys and girls interacting in a very fun and positive way,” she says. “I also see increasing self confidence transfer into the classroom, where students are taking more responsibility and caring about doing quality work.”

The Monday afternoon lessons have even gotten staff excited. “We hear the music, and many of us have gone in and danced with the kids. It’s a new connection. Music is a universal language, and it’s created a wonderful blending of cultures and generations,” Henkels says. “The students had a desire, and they were willing to work for it, and we wanted to honor that. We have incredibly caring teachers, and this is just another way that shows what our staff will do when they see needs in their students.”



Twain Elementary

## Kid Days Focus Resources

Twain teachers normally have weekly team meetings where student progress has always been discussed. Now Kid Days, which are scheduled once or twice a month based on need, gives that discussion more structure by focusing expert attention and using a one-sheet format to assure that the same process is applied for each child.

The team decides what extra staff they will need and invite the school learning coach, psychologist and social worker to attend Kid Day sessions. If the issue is serious, they may invite the principal. Sometimes, they invite special education teachers or speech and language therapists. “We know which students will be discussed at this specific time,” says learning coach Eugeniya Kovaleva, “and we come to the meeting prepared.”

Kid Days includes a format to monitor

progress, and teachers are seeing success. “We really appreciate having various experts come together to help us analyze and monitor progress. Together we come up with ideas we can use,” says Danielle Gongora, first-grade bilingual teacher. “The Kid Day group has helped us to more carefully identify children who might need an intervention. We use the data to guide our lessons, including specific areas that a child may need to master. It helps us focus all our lessons.”

Twain Elementary Principal Jose Celis says, “It’s working smarter instead of harder – coordinating time to discuss students, and more efficiently using the resources we have to support them. We are seeing a positive impact on students from Kid Days, and Twain is all about helping students be successful.”

*Kid Days includes a format to monitor progress, and teachers are seeing success.*





Kilmer Elementary School

# A Day of Healthy Choices

At Kilmer School, Snow Flurries is a Saturday of renewal and self improvement for fourth and fifth graders. “It’s really about helping kids make healthy choices and how to avoid getting involved in the kind of situations that aren’t good for them,” says Kilmer Elementary Principal Kim Zinman. “We want to start now, so our students will have the tools in place by the time they get to middle school, when peer pressure becomes more intense.”

Kilmer teachers volunteer as small-group leaders, others work on breakfast, lunch and clean up. Kilmer graduates who are now in high school volunteer as junior leaders. “We get donations from the community to help with meals to offset the cost to the kids,” Zinman says, “and our community has been

very generous.”

Flurries features large group sessions with guest speakers. This year, Victor Pacini used original songs and audience participation to highlight healthy choices, and Imagination Theater acted out situations that students might experience and suggest ways to respond. Then children broke into small group sessions where they process what they have heard and understand what it means to them. A DJ demonstrated some of the fun activities students can choose.

“We concluded with presentations by each group about what they have learned and a collage of photos to recap the day and let the kids see themselves working together,” says Zinman. “It’s an effective reminder of the guest speakers and their messages.”



*It’s about helping kids avoid the kind of situations that aren’t good for them*

Holmes Middle School

# The Gift of Sight

Seeing the numbers in your math book and the words on the board are basic to success in school, but the cost of eye exams and glasses can be a hurdle for low income families. Working with Lens Crafters’ Gift of Sight program, District 21 Nurse Nancy Knoerr has been able to bring school work into focus for many children.

“In District 21, we screen every kindergarten through fifth grade student,” explains Knoerr. “We also screen eighth graders and new students as they enroll. Our nurses have caught all kinds of eye conditions over the years that need addressing.”

Knoerr regularly takes advantage of the limited number of vouchers that Lens Crafters stores can give for exams and glasses, but just before Winter Break a once-a-year

opportunity called Home Town Day was offered for the first time to Holmes School.

Knoerr worked fast, selecting students from the screening program most in need of glasses and then contacted their parents. With the help of staff members Christy Gouletas, Chrissy Wolf and Theresa Rodriguez, 34 students were bussed to Lens Crafters by 8 a.m. “I had great support from their parents,” Knoerr says. “I always do.”

“Half the students got glasses immediately. Lens Crafters brought the rest to school the next day and fitted them on the children’s faces,” Knoerr says. “That was huge. Getting the kids back to the store would have been difficult. Now 33 more students at Holmes are able to see the board.”







Cooper Middle School

# Expanding Family Learning

Cooper Middle School hopes to double the number of parents participating in its Family Learning Program this year. “We sent home post cards and flyers, put info on our website, talked to parents at conferences, and our teachers make a personal phone call inviting them to join us,” says Cooper Middle School Principal Maureen Reilly.

During the two hour classes taught by Cooper language teachers, parents learn English proficiency and computer training. “Last year we taught parents how to get on the Internet, create their own account and set up e-mail,” Reilly says.

While their parents studied last year,

children explored cooking skills led by Mary Ann Morgenthal, mother of a Cooper teacher. “The children absolutely loved it,” Reilly says. “They each took home a plate of snacks to share. We’ll be doing cooking classes again and we’ll be adding sports to the children’s program.”

Beyond what they learn in class, Reilly says the Family Learning Program makes parents and their children more comfortable in the school setting. “It encourages them to come to our events and not be intimidated by the size of the school. The more comfortable the parents feel, the better our partnership can work to educate their children.”



London Middle School

# Answer the Call Scholarship

This year London Middle School will award its fourth annual Answer the Call Scholarship to help a London graduate with the cost of his or her text books for up to eight semesters of college.

London Middle School Principal Jim Parker explains, “This scholarship is intended as an inspiration to our students. The winners come back and give back to their school. We present this award at our graduation ceremony when all our eighth grade students are looking toward high school. We want our students to feel, ‘I can do it too. I can work hard. I can earn a scholarship. I can go to college.’ Next year we will have four recipients on stage demonstrating visually what happens through time for kids who are doing the right thing.”

The scholarship grew out of a program Mr.

Parker developed to provide students with a meaningful activity and a healthy snack after school. The London Ambassadors, seventh and eighth graders who help out around school, sell healthy snacks to students staying after school for clubs and games, and evening events. The snack cart provides valuable experience for those who staff the program, healthy snack alternatives for students, and it has generated enough income to support the Answer the Call Scholarship.

Parker hopes this ambitious program will be able to continue. “We are challenged right now and struggling a bit for funds, but we have everyone covered for this year and are hoping to continue to reach out to our students,” he says.

*The winners come back and give back to their school*







*For 30 minutes each day, every child in the school is assigned to the intervention or enrichment that they need*

### Frost Elementary

## Intervention Every Day

At Frost Elementary School, scheduling the time for at-risk students to receive the academic interventions they need is part of each day. “We have built intervention into our schedule so that all students in a grade are served at the same time,” said Frost Principal Rick Herrejon. “Before, if a child needed intervention, we had to find a teacher who was free and then decide from what content area the child would be pulled.”

Now, for 30 minutes each day, every child in the school is assigned to the intervention or enrichment that they need. The staff started discussion last year and put it into place this year. We have created a disruption-free half hour in each grade level. It has become a part of the students’ day.”

Fifth grade students were the first to use the new system. They were organized into two reading fluency intervention classes, two enrichment classes and one math intervention class. “We are most familiar with the fifth graders, so we had more data to identify their needs faster,” Herrejon explains. “We run the classes for seven to ten weeks and collect data. At the end of that time, we analyze the data and reposition the kids based on their needs.”

Previous intervention programs scheduled during lunch and after school are also being continued. “This intensifies the intervention for students who need it,” says Herrejon. “This will be a part of our program from now on.”

### Field Elementary School

## Mastering Complexity through Music



Music is an exciting part of Field School. “Once, music class was singing songs for fun, but music instruction has changed and for the better,” says Field Elementary Principal LaVonne Knapstein.

The music curriculum at Field School, like other schools in District 21, is literacy based. In the same way that young children first learn to read by learning how certain letters or combinations of letters make sounds, students learn to read and write music starting with the very basics. These basics include using their voice in other ways besides their everyday speaking voice, playing with the sound of their voice, making high sounds and low sounds, whispering, shouting, and ultimately singing.

“The students have two half-hour music classes each week, and our music teacher, Valerie

Rocha, makes every one of those 30 minutes count,” Knapstein says. “From the time they walk in, students are singing – following pitch and matching rhythms. Nothing is done without a purpose.”

By fourth and fifth grade, Field students have learned over 400 songs and can even compose their own songs. They are comfortable singing alone and in large groups, playing instruments and singing in parts — ready for middle school music programs.

While teaching intensely, Rocha makes sure her students have fun with music too. “We laugh and joke and have serious discussions,” Rocha says. “There is time for social development, but the kids know how to get down to business, and we can make that transition easily. Music allows students to do that.”





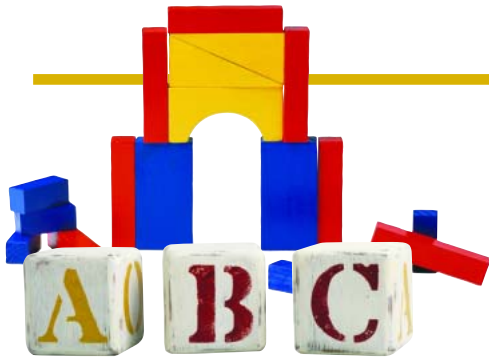
Hawthorne Early Childhood Center

## Laying the Groundwork for Good Education

This year District 21 made a commitment to increase programs for children at risk which includes expanding preschool services. Preschool classrooms have been added at Riley and Longfellow elementary schools along with those that were already in place at Riley, Field, Whitman and Twain schools. “The new programs will help reduce our wait list, which has been growing,” says Dr. Gwendolyn Gage, Principal of Hawthorne Early Childhood Center. Hawthorne houses blended programs for children with special needs, at-risk students and the preschool bilingual program. A Family Learning Program recently started at Hawthorne which provides weekly two-hour language classes for parents. “The staff saw a need for this,” Gage says, “and offering family learning during the day will reach

parents who are not free to attend in the evening. “Currently we are serving about 560 children in these various programs,” Gage says. “Early childhood programming gets the educational process off to a good start. Our preschool programs provide opportunities for children to discover and explore under the guidance of teachers who are knowledgeable about childhood development.” “We are giving children classroom experience and making sure every child has a chance to build gross and fine motor skills as well as develop a love of playing with letters,” says Gage. “We have already heard from kindergarten teachers in the district saying that they can see the benefits of preschool preparation.”

*Early childhood programming gets the educational process off to a good start*



Longfellow Elementary School

## Friendship Theme comes to Life

Longfellow School’s theme for this year is Friendship, and one of the ways this theme has been brought to life is through the musical, *Unity Tree*, performed for the school by second graders. In October, music teacher Laurie Guest asked for second graders willing to volunteer their lunch time recess to learn the musical — 58 children responded. Ms. Guest chose the play *Unity Tree* which tells how dogs and cats learn to work together. She began the daily task of teaching a musical to second graders. “Breaking out 150 speaking lines throughout the performance was a challenge,” Guest says. “The children not only had to know their own lines, but they had to know the lines before and after their own. We read them over and over. Then we put the script away, and they

had to memorize. Memorization is an important skill. It’s important for children to stretch their brains like that.” Adding to the drama, the show was postponed by a snow day until after winter break. Guest worried whether the children would still remember their lines after three weeks. It was so embedded, that they remembered every one of their lines. “We were very pleased with the program,” says Longfellow Elementary Principal Debra Serbin. “The fact that it was voluntary shows a high level of commitment by our students and teachers. The play illustrated that if we work together, we can be friends. This is a school where children learn together and get along together.”





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School District #21  
Preschool Summer  
2009 Child Find  
Screening

**What is Child Find?**

Wheeling School District #21 is required by federal law to evaluate preschool children with disabilities or developmental delays who may be eligible to receive special education services. The purpose of the screening is to identify those children who may be entitled to special education services. There is no cost for this service.

**How Do I Know If My Child Needs to Be Screened?**

Identifying potential problems early and addressing these concerns can be a very effective way to avoid later educational problems.

The following list of behaviors are warning signs of potential problems that might help parents decide if their child needs to be screened. It is important to remember that many typical children display these behaviors, so after reviewing these behaviors answer the questions that follow.

Watch for difficulties with:

- Speaking/understanding language/speech
- Vision/Hearing
- Walking/running
- Self-help skills
- Behavior/social skills
- Manipulating small objects/drawing

**Questions:** Please use the following questions with the above list of skills and behaviors (or other concerns) to help you determine the nature and extent of the problem:

- Do the child’s behaviors or skills differ significantly from his/her peers?
- Does the child’s problem behavior occur frequently and persistently?
- Has the child’s behavior occurred over a long period of time?

If you answered “yes” to one or more of these questions, you may want to call Child Find to schedule an appointment for a developmental screening.

**Who Can Be Screened by School District #21?**

Children who:

- Reside in the school district boundaries
- Ages 3-5 during the 2009-2010 school year

**Who will be screening my child?**

Your child will be screened by an early childhood special education team trained to administer and interpret developmental screening instruments.

**How to schedule a screening:**

Call 847-537-8270 (Mary Mueller) to schedule your summer screening. A short application will be taken over the phone.

**What happens at the screening appointment?**

- Parent permission for developmental screening and parent permission for exchange of information obtained
- A team member will ask you about your child’s growth and development.
- A nurse will check your child’s hearing/vision.
- Your child may be evaluated in one or more areas which the staff feels appropriate based on observation, review of records, etc. This may include speech, language, fine/gross motor, cognitive, social and self-help skills.

**Discussion of strategies/suggestions for parents**

Parents may not attempt to assist their children during the screening or re-interpret questions asked by the screener for their child, since the instruments used are standardized, and have to be administered in a specific way in order to give valid results. The process may take up to two hours.

At times, parents may be asked to wait outside the testing room during the screening.

A team member will share the screening results.

If an evaluation is necessary, a representative from Child Find will contact you to schedule an appointment for further evaluation(s). If your child is eligible to receive services, those services will be discussed with you, and you may decide to accept or decline those services.

**What if my child is bilingual or speaks limited or no English?**

The Preschool Child Find team will make every attempt to provide language appropriate evaluators and/or translators during the screening to ensure that the child’s abilities are measured accurately and are not hindered by difficulty in understanding English or by the screener’s inability to identify words used in another language.

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