

District 24 Digital Digest



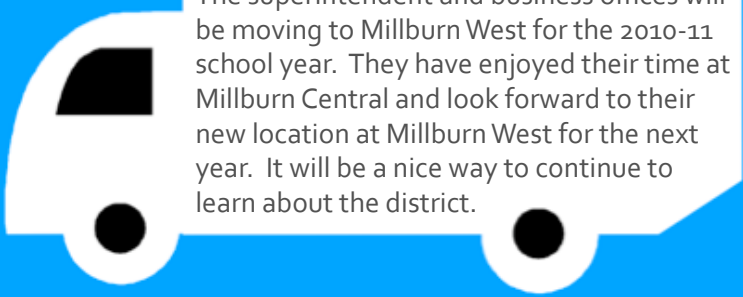
Board of Education

Shawn Lahr, President
Diane Campbell, Member

Bob Buehler, Vice President
Ken Dewitt, Member
Lisa Scanio, Member

Chris Stream, Secretary
Bob Reding, Member

Flashes of News



The superintendent and business offices will be moving to Millburn West for the 2010-11 school year. They have enjoyed their time at Millburn Central and look forward to their new location at Millburn West for the next year. It will be a nice way to continue to learn about the district.

Mrs. Erickson's 3rd Grade Class has fun in the LRC with a volume activity with Mrs. Hudson!



ILLINOIS HONOR ROLL—Both Millburn West and Millburn Central schools have once again made the Illinois Honor Roll. Only 438 schools across the state have earned this award. We had to have made AYP for the last three consecutive years in the areas of reading and math. Congratulations!! For more info, go to www.ilhonorroll.niu.edu

GREEN SAVINGS

Since we have gone to a mostly electronic format, we have not needed to put in our regular paper order. We have saved \$20,000 this year due to our use of technology in this way.

Board Briefs

What has your Millburn Board of Education been doing for the last quarter? See below for some highlights:

- Had monthly financial discussions regarding possibilities of reconfiguration or re-districting to see if a cost savings exists
- Updated policies relating to Access to District Public Records, Transportation, Equal Employment Opportunity and Minority Recruitment, Harassment of Students Prohibited, Curriculum Content, Homework, Types of School Board Meetings, Preventing Bullying, Intimidation, and Harassment
- Heard and rejected a proposal from Chevron to help upgrade some facilities needs. At this time, it is cost-prohibitive.
- Agreed to a one-year extension on the lease for the district-owned home; then there will be a lottery process for whomever volunteers for this position based upon specific criteria. Cost savings to the district: Over \$20,000
- Heard a World Languages presentation by BOE member Lisa Scanio
- Heard a presentation by PMA Financial Services and contracted with them for one year.
- Approved a bus lease program (only vehicles, not staff) ensuring that our students ride on the safest busses at a cost-neutral or savings to the district
- Heard a presentation regarding employee benefits from GCG Financial
- Appointed new Freedom of Information Act officers (FOIA)
- Adopted the 2010-11 school calendar
- Reviewed registration and activity fees
- Reviewed our 5 Year Financial Forecast
- Discussed a revision to the Staff Recognition Awards process
- Put into place a plan for allowing parents to pay for fees and lunch online next year

If these sound like topics you would be interested in knowing about, please visit our website at <http://www.millburn24.net/schoolboard.cfm?subpage=76383>

We have our meeting dates listed if you are interested in joining us.

Spelling Bee

Spelling Bees were held at both schools on January 29th. Central's top speller was Garrett Swanson (8th grade). The runner-up was Sam Moy (7th grade). The winner at West was Clare Cunningham (7th grade) and the runner-up was Vince Rotunno (8th grade).



Financial FAQs

by Dr. Ellen E. Maurer

Below are a list of questions that parents have been asking all year. We thought it would be helpful information for everyone to have.

Q: I heard that Millburn was going to reconfigure next year and it will save money. Is that true?

A: First of all, please do not be alarmed. Reconfiguration is only one of the ideas that the BOE discussed, but it was not the only idea. They have also discussed all non-mandated programs, class size, and will be discussing other ideas in the next month. All community input will be solicited. I know the Board of Education does not want to make any quick decisions without getting all input. Then, they can make the best decision based upon the big picture. It is truly unfortunate that we have \$3.7 million in TAW debt (short-term debt) and that our forecasting shows that we will run another \$800,000 to \$1.3 million beyond that within the next 2 years. It is very important that we continue to run a balanced budget and to do that, something has to give. Minimally, we must cut the \$800,000 to \$1.3 million. We still do not have accurate figures from the state and we are expecting them to reduce our student aid by \$450.00 per student, or approximately \$720,000. That is included in the amount we must cut.

The BOE cut 1.3 million last year and with those cuts, almost nothing was reinstated. That means that all we have left in the budget to cut are staff positions and non-mandated programming. No one wants to do those things because they directly impact the students in terms of extras and class size. We need to be creative and look at every last option including cuts and reconfiguration, but also look at asking the community if they are willing to pay more tax dollars to keep up operating at the current levels. These are all discussions taking place

at the board level. I am interested in how people might feel about a tax increase in these tough economic times. The BOE is now discussing how best to gather parent input.

Please understand that the dollar figure of \$379,000 was just a sample of one year's savings IF we had done that scenario for next year and this scenario was given purely for discussion purposes, it was not intended as a plan for next year. We did not even address the compounding factor that this dollar amount may have over time.

The Board of Education does not ever want to change what truly makes Millburn School District #24 a special place: the warm, nurturing staff members, the close-knit community feel we get as we walk through the doors of each school, the personal attention that is given to each child, and the willingness of the BOE and the staff members to work together for the best interests of our children.

Q: What is a Tax Anticipation Warrant? Do all schools finance with TAWs?

A: No. Try to think of it with this analogy: In your household, if you suddenly experienced a loss of income and your expenses stayed the same, you could either cut your expenses or use a credit card to pay them. TAWs are like using a credit card when you can't pay your bills on time. Then, you experience a dependence on the credit card and you need to borrow more and more each month if you do not cut your expenses. Additionally, there is the interest to pay off. That is why it is not the best idea to take out TAWs. Unfortunately, we are in a bind. If we simply cut 3.7 million from the budget, we would have no staff at all left to teach students. This is why it must be done slowly or to ask for a tax hike. The further we go into debt and the earlier we have to borrow, the more likely it is that we will stay on the state's financial watch/warning list.

Q: I don't understand how we can run a balanced budget, but still have to depend upon TAWs. Why are we anticipating such a shortfall in a year?

A: This is a tough question. The budget itself is balanced for this year, but since our expenditures (salaries, benefits, costs for utilities, maintenance of buildings, etc.) keeps going up 3.5 to 7 percent each year and we work under a tax cap, we are only getting in for revenue either 5% or whatever the current CPI is. Last year it was 0.1% and next year it is going to be 2.7%. This is all the money we are legally able to collect. We can't control certain kinds of costs like the building maintenance and vendor pricing. We can only look for the most inexpensive. Our teachers are on a contract that was bargained 4 years ago and the structure cannot be changed until it is up for renewal. Also, Governor Quinn's newest budget shows us getting approximately \$720,000 less in state aid.

Q: Can't we cut non-teaching positions and fill them with parent volunteers?

A: We are bare bones on all of our non-teaching staff. Our only teaching assistants are there and are trained for children with special needs and those minutes the children are required to have them cannot simply be reduced because we have no money. We are legally obligated to service special education children with what is written into their plans for learning. Parent volunteers cannot fulfill this function legally.

In terms of our administrative staff, we are bare bones there, too. When you look online at the Illinois State Board of Education website to see where we rank in terms of administrative costs, we are third from the bottom in the entire state of Illinois. In our buildings alone, best practice would be 1:350 and we are at 1:1100 and 1:500 approximately. Our district level administrators do not even all have appropriate support staff help. Our

secretarial staff at both buildings and at the district is very, very thin. We are all making do with less.

Q: What if we had a tax referendum to just collect as much money as we owe on the TAWs? Wouldn't that mean that we would then be operating on a cash in, cash out basis and we would be in good shape?

A: Well, one would think that, but if we do not have a higher rate in our educational fund on tax bills, we will just be back in the same position of having to make cuts or borrow each and every year. Yes, it would help a great deal to pay off the TAWs, but for long-term, we need to have reserves of about 25% due to the way we are paid from the county and state. The state runs about 120 days behind and we never know if/when we will get what is predicted. This makes budgeting very difficult. If we had a reserves, we would be doing more interfund borrowing and not have to get into the TAWs. It is very important to note that the state of Illinois has a tax cap on our school districts for the sole purpose of making sure that we run out of money on a regular basis so that it is truly up to the local taxpayers as to whether or not they want to pay for things at the school district. A regular cycle might look like this: A district runs an ed fund referendum for x dollars and tells the taxpayers that this will keep the district in good financial standing with class sizes and programs as they currently are for x number of years. Once the money runs out in x year, the question must again be asked of the taxpayers.

Q: What would it take to collect more money through a tax referendum? Why is it so confusing? Is it confusing to everyone or am I just someone who does not get it?

A: Well, this is where it gets really sticky because the Board of Education has to decide:

- 1-If they want to ask for an increase
- 2-If so, how much and how long will that last
- 3-If they ask for an amount that does not pass, then they are in the

unenviable position of having to decide what is going to be cut

Just to pay off the TAWs in one fell swoop would be approximately \$721 per year for every \$200,000 home. That does not address the educational fund tax rate at all. This is why this gets difficult. It may be that we need to hunker down and pay off things more slowly and be very, very frugal. (which we already are, believe me!) If we ask for too much, it won't pass. If we ask for a small amount, it won't last for more than a year or two. Please don't think you are the only one who gets confused about school finance. There are financial people out there working on this all the time and it is so hard to explain to people because our school finance system does not work exactly like a regular business or household budget. We have many unfunded mandates and expenses that are totally out of our control. Most educators don't even have a full grasp of something this complex.

Q: So is a higher educational rate on the tax bills something that the community votes on? Did they ask for too little in the past?

A: Yes, this is what we could ask for in a referendum. No, it is not that too little was asked for, it was that there were 2 referenda going on at once and for both to pass, they had to make sure they were not asking for too much all at one time. One was for the building itself and the other was for the educational fund rate.

Q: Didn't people pay for a referendum last time to keep small class sizes?

A: From what I understand historically, yes, people paid additionally to keep class size down. The money they paid to keep the education fund going was only projected to last 5 years and it is gone.

Q: I heard that this financial crisis is due to the construction of Millburn West and that we really did not need to build another building. Is this true? Isn't there a lot of unused space at West?

A: We are not in a financial crisis because of building Millburn West. We are borrowing TAWs because we have gone through every last penny in reserves that we had and we do not have enough money in our budget to make payroll each month. We need to borrow to make payroll, then when our tax money comes in, we pay it back. It has nothing to do with new construction. It has to do with our revenues coming in way under our expenditures.

The district did not overbuild and really needed to have another building. We did not have room at Central for more students and they were holding related arts classes on carts, PE in the hallways, and brown bagging lunch in the classrooms. We have many more students now than we did at that time. There is no way to fit all of the kids in our district in Central without going back to these things and then paying for trailers to house the 350 or so kids that could not fit in the building. We would also have significant issues with the well and septic there. We would lose over \$100,000 that we currently get each year from renting 5 of our classrooms to SEDOL.

Although West is not crowded, there is not a lot of unused space there. Both of our school buildings are in fairly good shape for some growth, but not a lot.

Q: Is our district at a disadvantage because we feed into 3 high schools?

A: No. We are at a disadvantage because we have to depend upon residents for property taxes and have almost no commercial base upon which to draw. It has nothing to do with going to several high schools.

Q: Wouldn't it be better to have our own high school district or only feed into one high school? Is consolidation with a high school district an option?

A: We are already one of the most streamlined, frugal districts I have ever seen. Adding a high school here would put us further into debt and we would not be able to offer all of the courses and extras that our feeder high schools have. As for consolidation with another district, that has only been show to increase course offerings for students, but has not proved to be a financial cure-all.

Q: What if I still don't understand this and have more questions?

A: I am available at almost any time to talk to any group or individual that would like further explanation.



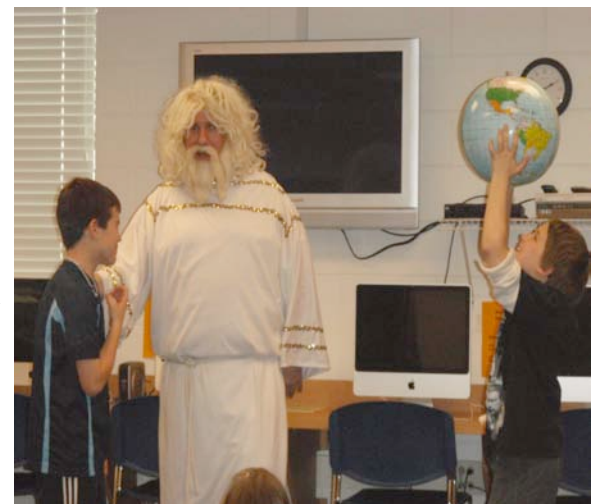
Book Buddies



Teacher in the News

Millburn Central 7th grade teacher, Ms. Karissa Berg applied and was accepted into Northrop Grumman's Discover-E program. Two engineers came in on March 11 to talk with and do hands-on engineering 'stuff' with each of the science classes at Millburn Central. The goal was to help improve student interest in technology, science, and math and to show how these subjects are used in the real world.

ZEUS VISITS
FOURTH GRADERS
AT WEST





Ms. Roberts
and her young
learners



New Start Times for the 2010-11 School Year!

Central School will move to one start time of 8:10 a.m. to dismissal at 2:40 p.m.. There will be no more than 60 students on each bus and, with the exception of Wadsworth, routes will be about 15-20 minutes long. We are very happy to have shorter routes since there is less unstructured time for students.

West School will also have a new start time of 8:40 a.m. to dismissal at 3:10 p.m.

See more detailed information in the "Principal's Principles" section.

TRANSPORTATION NEWS

You may be interested to know that our Board of Education has approved a bus leasing agreement for next year. What does this mean for you as a taxpayer?

- We will be replacing our fleet with one-year old busses that meet all of the newest safety, emissions, and communications standards at no additional cost to the taxpayers.
- These new models are more fuel-efficient and, since all maintenance is covered under the lease agreement, we will avoid \$95,000 + in our yearly maintenance costs.
- We are only leasing the equipment, not the personnel, so you can look forward to us keeping our own Millburn drivers!
- The total cost of the lease is reimbursable at 80% under Illinois law; therefore, we can expect to receive 80% back of what we pay in a lease.
- We will gain approximately \$261,000 from the sale of our old fleet. Although that cannot be transferred to the educational fund, we can use the money for inter-fund borrowing, thus putting off what we would have had to borrow from an outside source.



PRESCHOOL SCREENING

Millburn School District is offering screening for preschoolers with *suspected developmental delays*. Developmental areas evaluated include speech and language, small and large motor skills, and pre-academic skills. The next screenings will be held on the mornings of Friday June 4, 2010, **BY APPOINTMENT ONLY**. This is available to district three and four year olds. Parents should bring an original county certificate of their child's birth. ***A hospital certificate is not valid verification of a child's birth. Proof of residency is required.*** To schedule an appointment, please call the Special Services office at 847.356.8331 x2908.



CURRICULUM CORNER

From Dr. Cheryl Kucera

Every year I am amazed at how fast the days go by. Here we are already beginning the fourth, and last, quarter of the school year. As the spring days warm into summer, it becomes harder and harder to concentrate on school for both the teachers and the students, but there is much to be accomplished before the end of the school year.

We have begun the new semester with Measures of Academic Process (MAP) testing of grades 2-8 in both schools. The spring MAP testing event is very important because it helps to show how much our students have grown in skills and knowledge during the school year. The testing event begins April 6 and ends April 20. Visit the website (www.nwea.org) if you would like more information about MAP testing. On April 23 we are having a full day of staff development. The teachers will look at the NWEA data and reflect on their instruction and on their students' learning. This will also be a time for the teachers to learn more about the Response to Intervention or RtI process in the district.

What is Response to Intervention? "RtI is the practice of **providing high-quality instruction and intervention** matched to student need, **monitoring progress frequently** to make decisions about change in instruction and goals, and **applying the child's response data to important educational decisions.**" (NASDE, 2005) It is proactive, helps ALL students and uses interventions that work! It reduces over-identification of students for Special Education and examines and improves instruction. Part of the purpose of RtI is to assure that instruction and curriculum in the general education classroom allow the vast majority of students to be proficient and meet state standards.

To support administrators and teachers during this time of change, the state of Illinois continues to develop support and explanation for the Response to Intervention (RtI) process based on the Problem Solving model. To that end, the Illinois State Board of Education released a new nineteen-page guidance document in January 2010. Becoming familiar with this document will be one of the goals of the teacher staff development activities on April 23. There is a great deal of pressure on educators to be accountable for educational outcomes so learning how to help students to improve in their area(s) of weakness is an important, multi-faceted skill that has many components and takes time to learn.

Meanwhile, the teachers in grades K-5 are learning skills and strategies in math and reading that will help the students in the regular classroom. Educators in grades K-3 are learning an effective way to precisely pinpoint their students' progress in math concepts. They are learning how to give an in-class assessment of math concepts for the primary grades that can be administered quickly with reliability and validity. Though a teacher can readily tell when a student is having trouble with math, identifying the exact area of lack of knowledge can be more difficult. This assessment technique will hopefully make identification of problem areas easier. Then targeted interventions can be delivered focusing on the area of need. The teachers in grades 4-5 are learning about reading strategies to improve the reading skills of students. They are also watching as experts demonstrate how to use these strategies in the classrooms. Funding for these two staff developments has come from the ARRA funding resources that the federal government has given to the state. ARRA stands for American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

In May the students will be given a very short assessment in reading and math called AIMSweb. They have already been assessed in the fall and in the winter. The data from these assessments is another way for teachers to review how effective the year's curriculum has been in helping students grow in knowledge and skills. If you would like to learn more about this assessment, please visit the AIMSweb website (www.aimsweb.com)

DATES TO REMEMBER:

District Assessments

MAP (Spring) Testing in Grades 2-8
April 7 - April 20

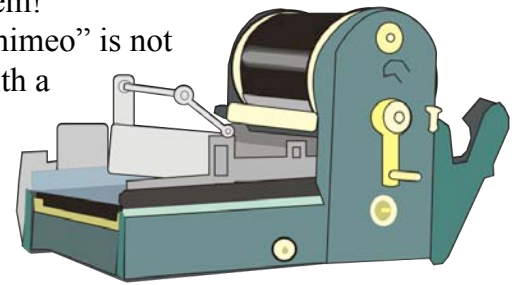
AIMSweb (Spring) Benchmarking
in Grades K-8
May 3 - May 7

Bits & Bytes from the Tech Team

Now that you know a bit about what happens in the technology classes from previous editions of the Digital Digest, you might be interested in what the students use in the way of hardware. We have three instructional computer labs at Central and two at West all equipped with iMacs. Both libraries are well equipped with new iMacs which we were able to purchase with government stimulus funds. Additionally, there are two mobile computer carts at each school with at least 25 MacBooks on each. Classrooms are equipped with 4-6 machines of various ages depending on where we are in the rotation cycle of hardware. Recently, we placed new iMacs in all special education classrooms as well, again compliments of government stimulus funds.

A technology focus for this year has been the infusion of interactive white boards. Stimulus funding also provided us with an opportunity to acquire 22 new Mimio units. When some hear the word Mimio, they are immediately taken back to the days when teachers used a smelly machine to roll off copies of worksheets with math problems on them!

Yesterday's Mimeograph Machine, commonly referred to as the "mimeo" is not to be confused with Mimio of today! When used in conjunction with a video projector it turns the ordinary classroom whiteboard into a fully interactive whiteboard. These units were placed in both special education and some general education classrooms.



Teachers have enthusiastically volunteered to pioneer this technology and have had great success using it to create engaging lessons in many curricular areas. Check out this link if you would like more info on the specifics of the Mimio <http://www.mimio.com/products/index.asp>.



If you are looking for great online resources, don't forget to check out the Millburn website, technology pages. We try to keep those links current and add resources as we discover them. Additionally, we love our public library partners. If you go to the @ Your Library quick link on our website, you will find the links to our local public libraries. If you can't get there with your kids physically, at least you can take a virtual trip by taking advantage of some of their online resources as well.



Principal's Principles

Spring 2010 Volume 1, Issue 4

Millburn Central School
Jason Lind, Principal

Single Start Time
2010-11 SY

Dear Millburn Central Community,

Millburn Central will be moving to a single start time for the 2010-2011 school year, after much discussion. As with any scheduling decision, there are advantages and disadvantages to changing these times. We have weighed all the possible scenarios, and we have decided that the "pros" outweigh the "cons". We think this will be a positive change for our parents, students, and staff, and it will allow us to be more efficient as an organization.

We have had many conversations about the "cons" list, and we will do our best to creatively work within the schedule to help the special services groups meet their required minutes. I am confident that we can accomplish these goals. Please feel free to contact me any time with any specific questions you may have about this change.

The schedule will follow the current K-4 time frame. All students K-8 will attend from 8:10-2:40.

Pros

- Easier on parents with multiple children across the grade levels
- Sports/After school activities will start earlier, and end earlier
- Potential Cost Savings for busing
- Shortens overall school day by 40 minutes
- K-8 students on same bus
- More aides available for supervision before and after school times
- Efficient use of meeting times for staff development
- Efficient use of early dismissal time for staff development
- Announcements would be consistent at the beginning of the day
- Longer time frames for busing on field trips

Cons

- Speech schedule- we currently have speech teachers delivering service outside the regular school day.
- Crazy busy in the office during sign in and out
- Band schedule will be earlier
- K-8 students on same bus
- Aim schedules may be impacted

Millburn Central School
Jake Jorgenson, Principal

Start and End Time Change
2010-2011 School Year

Dear Millburn West Community,

It is hard to believe that this year will soon be coming to a close. The next two months will go by very fast. As you know, we are working on class lists, schedules and teacher placement for the upcoming school year. I am sure that you will soon be making your own plans for next year. I wanted to share with everyone that Millburn West will have a 10 minutes start and end time change for the upcoming school year. School will start at 8:40 rather than 8:30. School will end at 3:10 rather than 3:00. I hope this information proves to be helpful as you start to arrange child-care plans and other schedules.