



Dates to  
remember

See *The Weekly* (<https://www.sd735.org/newsletters>) for up-to-date district information.

**Dec. 14**—1st Grade Winter Music Concert, 6 p.m., Middleton School, 8300 St. Louis Ave.

**Dec. 14**—2nd Grade Winter Music Concert, 7 p.m., Middleton School.

**Dec. 19**—Winter Concert (McCracken Orchestra), 6:30 p.m., Niles North HS, 9800 Lawler Ave.

**Dec. 19**—Winter Concert (McCracken Choirs and Symphonic Band), 7:30 p.m., Niles North HS.

**Dec. 25**—First day of winter break. No school for two weeks.

**Dec. 27**—District finance committee meeting, McCracken Middle School, 8000 East Prairie Rd.

**Jan. 8, 2024**—School resumes after winter break.

**Board meetings**—The Board of Education meets at 7 p.m. on the second Tuesday of each month at McCracken unless noted. All community members are invited to attend. Meetings also are live-streamed via YouTube with links posted in advance at the district web site. Public comments emailed to [contactboe@sd735.org](mailto:contactboe@sd735.org) will be made part of the public record.

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## Program offer mentoring to aides new to the classroom

In today's public schools, a number of roles can be filled by individuals who are not certified as teachers. Known in District 73.5 as "paraprofessionals," these people serve as extra eyes, ears and hands in classrooms, media centers and other areas in all three school buildings.

Support roles have been around for a long time, but district officials this year created the Paraprofessional Mentorship Program to better train those new to the job and help them with their career growth. In the program, each new hire is matched with an experienced mentor. The pairs meet weekly to discuss their jobs and address questions or concerns. Once a month, mentors and mentees get together for further professional development and team building.

"The program gives mentees a role model, a friendly ear to listen to concerns, someone to offer advice, and a guide to the district's culture," said Heather Haggerty, a 15-year veteran at Middleton School who works as an assistant in the media center. Haggerty is one of those union members who approached Supt. Zipporah Hightower in September 2022 to propose the idea.

She credits Hightower and Kevin Poduska, the district's new director of curriculum, instruction and assessment, for getting the program running this fall after a year of planning. The district's goals are to help paraprofessionals develop their skills and knowledge, teach strategies for promoting student success, increase collaboration and reduce iso-



Paraprofessionals support teachers and students at Meyer School (at top) and Middleton School (above).

lation, and improve recruitment and retention. As one of the most experienced paraprofessionals in the district, Haggerty said her role in the program "is to be a mentor to the mentors."

*Continued on back page*

# New curriculum head ‘privileged’ to join district

District 73.5’s new curriculum chief brings experience and a desire to bring people together to his new post.

Kevin Poduska was named the district’s director of curriculum, instruction and assessment at the beginning of this school year. He came from District 205 in Elmhurst, where he led the literacy/EL division at York High School. He previously taught English and Reading at Hersey High School in Arlington Heights, and has also consulted for Chicago Public

*The district defines Poduska’s role this way: “Curriculum: what we want students to learn; Instruction: how we help students learn; and Assessment: how we measure learning throughout the process.”*

Schools and the Urban Education Leadership program at the University of Illinois-Chicago.

“I lean into the principles that the things we do best we do together, and when we know better, we do better,” he said in describing how he plans to approach his job. “I very deeply value communitarian practices such as collaboration, deliberation, and shared leadership.”

On its website, the district breaks down

the three phases of Poduska’s role this way: “Curriculum: what we want students to learn; Instruction: how we help students learn; and Assessment: how we measure learning throughout the process.” He said that supporting teachers in these three areas is “the heart of my role.”

Poduska has spent time getting the lay of the land. “Each day, I learn more about the nuts and bolts of our district’s structures, systems, and history,” he said. “I seek to better understand our students, families, and staff’s very real experiences as members of our district community.”

He is committed to providing teachers with the tools they need to “focus on doing their very best work with students and their families.” That commitment requires “clear and responsive communication channels, organized and accessible collections of curricular resources, coherent roadmaps for shared work and professional learning, and purposeful curriculum development processes,” he said.

Poduska will look to standard testing and surveys such as the Panorama SEL Survey and the 5Essentials Survey to measure progress. But he recognizes the value of other means of assessment as well. “Some examples of this kind of ‘street data’ include daily student work, our teams’ shared projects, and feedback from follow-



Kevin Poduska

ing professional learning activities,” he said. He believes those methods “tell the parts of the ‘on the ground’ story of our students, families, and staff’s shared growth that the normative metrics alone cannot.”

Growing up in the Chicago area, Poduska was familiar with the community. “All these years later, as an educator here, I have a renewed appreciation for Skokie’s richness and diversity,” he said. “Its richness is a reminder to me each day of how privileged I am to be a character in its story.”

## New logo embraces whole school community

School officials had clear objectives for the new District 73.5 logo that began appearing at the beginning of the school year, and they believe the new design met those goals.

Supt. Zipporah Hightower, Board President Emily Miller and Communications Manager Ruth Sinker began meeting last year to figure out what the new design should include. Hightower said they wanted to represent each of the three school buildings, convey the notion of supporting students, and make it a vehicle for student artwork. As they deliberated, she said, they reached out to district art teachers, who had their students work on projects that could fit the logo.

The finished product was designed by Chicago-based de-



signer Denise Wurl. It’s now visible on the district web site and printed materials distributed by the district, including this newsletter (see page 1).

Wurl described the new logo this way in a statement to the school board: “The half circle represents the district (the ‘half’ in 73.5), with the three inner circles representing the three schools: innermost being Meyer, with the second and third circles gradually opening, representing the growth of the students themselves, and their education (i.e., opening their minds through education). The additional rings extending from the district half-circle represent the support of students by district administration, staff and faculty throughout their education.”

# Introducing new District 73.5 staff



*Candice Amelio*



*Melissa Brander*



*Celia Buell*



*Kiernan Dunham*



*Trevor Dykes*



*Melanie Eckert*



*Amory Hitt*



*Riley Hoerner*



*Amanda Ibrahim*



*DeEric Johnson*



*Gis Jose*



*Khadeeja Khatoon*



*Catherine Koerner*



*Klaudia Kukla*



*Sana Malik*



*Meghan Marinescu*



*Hannah Mosher*



*Alexandra Moshi*



*Renya Odisho*



*Lauren Radner*



*Saliha Rahim*

District 73.5 welcomes these new staff members for the 2023-24 school year:

Candice Amelio, Meyer Speech Language Pathologist

Melissa Brander, McCracken Special Education Teacher

Celia Buell, Middleton Paraprofessional

Kiernan Dunham, 4th Grade Teacher

Trevor Dykes, McCracken Assistant Principal

Melanie Eckert, Middleton Special Education Teacher

Amory Hitt, McCracken Paraprofessional

Riley Hoerner, District Special Education Coordinator

Amanda Ibrahim, Middleton Cadre Substitute

DeEric Johnson, Buildings & Grounds Custodian

Gis Jose, Meyer Paraprofessional

Khadeeja Khatoon, Middleton Paraprofessional

Catherine Koerner, Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA)

Klaudia Kukla, McCracken Spanish Teacher

Sana Malik, Meyer Paraprofessional

Meghan Marinescu, Middleton Lunch Supervisor

Hannah Mosher, McCracken Social Worker

Alexandra Moshi, Meyer Preschool teacher

Renya Odisho, Middleton Recess Supervisor

Lauren Radner, Middleton Cadre Substitute

Saliha Rahim, Middleton Recess Supervisor

Rosa Raya, Assistant Director of Buildings & Grounds

Abby Retzinger, Middleton Special Education Teacher

Monica Scherer, Middleton Reading Interventionist

Tahreem Shahid, Meyer Paraprofessional

Sydney Zucker, 1st Grade Teacher



*Rosa Raya*



*Abby Retzinger*



*Monica Scherer*



*Tahreem Shahid*



*Sydney Zucker*

*Community Digest*  
Skokie School District 73.5  
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Written, designed and produced by Complete Communications, Inc., Skokie, Illinois



## Fall musical 'Into The Woods' a hit

McCracken Middle School students and staff put together a very successful production of "Into The Woods" in November for the school's fall musical.

Counting cast and crew, more than 60 students participated. "There were many featured roles, rather than most shows having only a few big leads," said Amy Keipert, McCracken's vocal music teacher. "Because the plot of 'Into the Woods' weaves together stories from multiple fairy tales, many of our talented students got to have moments in the spotlight."

Besides a chance to get up on stage, there are other clear benefits

for students who become involved. "Participating in a musical not only strengthens the students' artistic and creative skills in singing, acting, and dance, but it helps them learn to perform under pressure, how to build their confidence, and how to collaborate together through months of work toward a common goal," she said.

Keipert directed the show, the music and choreography. Kate Magnuson, seventh-grade ELA teacher, acted as producer, and Sally Alvarado, McCracken EL teacher, was technical director. Numerous parent volunteers also contributed to set design, prop creation and other duties.

## Mentoring

*Continued from front page*

Support staff in District 73.5 are as diverse as the district community itself. Haggerty said many are new to the job market or to the U.S., others are returning to work after raising their children, and some are seeking a stepping stone to a teaching ca-

reer. "This effort contributes to the goal of growing a culturally diverse educator staff here in District 73.5," she said. "Furthermore, the program is intended to ensure that new staff feel supported and comfortable and successful in their roles so that they want to continue working and growing in the district."

She added that paraprofessionals who

speak languages other than English play an especially important role. "The ability to communicate to students and families in their home languages contributes to our district's welcoming environment and cultural richness," she said. "We hope the mentorship program will encourage and support our new paraprofessionals so they remain with the district."

## District 73.5 guiding principles

- ◆ Our schools will support and inspire our students
- ◆ Our students will be critical thinkers and creative problem solvers
- ◆ Our community will demonstrate integrity and respect
- ◆ Our graduates will help make the world a better place