



## Promises Made, Promises Kept

### Keeping Promises During an Economic Downturn

West Aurora School District 129 values fiscal responsibility and takes seriously its role as the financial steward for the community's tax dollars.

In response to the downturn in the economy, a newly constituted District 129 financial advisory committee is already in the process of developing responses, including suggested spending priorities. We will engage the public in this discussion of how we

can continue to operate more efficiently and, at the same time, keep our promise to improve student learning.

An immediate and serious threat to our mission is a State of Illinois decision that will siphon our local tax dollars out of classrooms and into financial institutions.

Specifically, the State of Illinois, which provides more than one-third of the district's annual funding, is withholding the money. As of December 9, the state was behind by nearly \$4.4 million in distributions to School District 129!

### STATE FUNDING DELAYS AS OF 12/9/08

Program	Voucher Date(s)	Amount
General State Aid	12/4/2008	\$1,340,369.66
Fast-Growing District Assistance	10/30/2008	\$374,629.00
Special Education Private Facility	9/25/2008	\$322,079.94
Funding For Children Requiring Spec Ed	9/24/2008	\$444,781.52
Special Education Personnel	9/25/2008	\$511,260.37
Special Education Orphanage	9/25/2008	\$33,363.56
Work Experience and Career Exploration Program	10/21/2008	\$5,798.00
State Lunch Program	10/16, 11/13/2008	\$26,969.00
Regular & Voc Ed Transportation	9/24/2008	\$1,201,166.00
Special Education Transportation	9/24/2008	\$422,089.35
Early Childhood Block Grant	8/27/08, 9/17/08,9/25/08,10/23/08,11/19/08,12/2/08	\$710,939.00
Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Safety Grant	10/29/2008	\$204,578.00
Orphanage Tuition	9/25/2008	\$2,002.14
Class Size Reduction	10/15, 11/17/2008	\$134,082.00
	<b>TOTAL STATE</b>	<b>\$4,393,737.88</b>

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These programs, many of them state and federally mandated, are already up and running. Without timely disbursement of these funds, the district must resort to larger short-term borrowing to pay our obligations.

You are now in danger of seeing your local property tax dollars pulled from the classroom and sent instead to the banks in the form of interest payments.

We urge you to contact your local state representatives in the Illinois General Assembly and ask them to end this practice:

- **Rep. Linda Chapa LaVia**, 8 E. Galena Blvd., Suite 240, Aurora, IL 60506, (630) 264-6855, [chapa-laviali@ilga.gov](mailto:chapa-laviali@ilga.gov);
- **Rep. Patricia Reid Lindner**, 32 Main St., Suite A, Sugar Grove, IL 60554, (630) 466-9791, [dstrct50@aol.com](mailto:dstrct50@aol.com);
- **Sen. Chris Lauzen**, 52 W. Downer Place, Suite 201, Aurora, IL 60506, (630) 264-2334, [admin@lauzen.com](mailto:admin@lauzen.com);
- **Sen. Linda Holmes**, 13300 S. Rt. 59, #2B-1, Plainfield, IL 60544, (815) 609-3711, [senatorholmes42@sbcglobal.net](mailto:senatorholmes42@sbcglobal.net).

In the meantime, send your comments and suggestions to me at [V129@sd129.org](mailto:V129@sd129.org) or call at 630-301-5033.

— Superintendent Jim Rydland

## Teaching and Learning



### New Science Curriculum in Schools

Following two years of planning and research, District 129 students are now enjoying a much improved science curriculum. In addition to better textbooks and experiments, there are now extensive resources on the Web. In fact, hundreds of elementary parents recently attended a “science night” to learn how to use online science resources at home to help their children study.

### More Time for Elementary Students

Next to receive longer school days are the elementary and middle schools. Next year students will receive additional instructional time in the core subject areas -- language arts, math, science and social studies.

### Additional Improvements In Place

This year, the school district, also added a fourth- and fifth-grade advanced reading class for gifted and talented students. Another major improvement – this time at the high school – began this fall with the addition of an additional eighth instructional period. This longer school day is providing more educational options for all students and appears to be related to this year’s increase in the attendance rate.

### Continued Focus on Core Curriculum

On top of these improvements, major core-subject upgrades are underway. Look for a stronger math curriculum in classrooms next fall. In addition, District 129 English teachers are developing a framework to strengthen writing instruction.



### Advanced Placement Scholar Numbers Growing

Thirty-four recently graduated West Aurora High School students have earned the designation of AP Scholar by the College Board in recognition of their exceptional achievement on the college-level Advanced Placement Program (AP) Exams. The AP Program offers students the opportunity to take challenging college-level courses while still in high school and receive college credit, advanced placement or both for successful performance on the exams.

The number of West students to receive AP Scholar recognition has been growing. For example, 23 students received recognition in 2005. Passage of an operating rate referendum in 2007 allowed the West High to add additional AP classes. As a result, students are now more prepared for the tests and the overall number of students taking AP classes has risen, according to West counselor Amy Winslow.

## Safe, Secure School Buildings

Over the summer, the district completed several maintenance projects designed to keep its 20 buildings safe and functional. This included fixing foundation and drainage problems at Freeman, Hill, Goodwin, Hall and McCleery.



The district also abated asbestos at Freeman, Hall, Smith, Washington and West and replaced a leaky roof at Lincoln. Eight West High bathrooms were renovated and several schools received extensive painting.

The district also received 14 new school buses as part of an ongoing refresh cycle to replace aging, less fuel-efficient vehicles. The buses are equipped with video security cameras.

This fall four portable classroom trailers were installed on the front lawn at Jefferson to relieve classroom crowding. As it does annually, the district again reviewed its school crisis plans with police and fire departments and completed fire department inspections of each facility.

## Financial Responsibility

### Effort to Examine Fiscal Issues

In exchange for voter approval of the 2007 operating rate referendum, the district promised to operate in a fiscally responsible manner. With the recent, severe economic downturn, the meaning of "fiscally responsible" may change. To this end, Superintendent Rydland has formed a financial advisory committee to help him develop responses to economic changes. He is also consulting the Superintendent's Community Advisory Council, a parent group that discusses issues with the Superintendent on a monthly basis, and he has enlisted the assistance of public finance specialists.

The district will engage the public in an open discussion of fiscal issues as it develops its budget for the next fiscal year beginning July 1.

In the meantime, as part of its regular mode of operation, the district has been finding ways to lower costs and find additional funding sources for this school year.

### Cost Sharing

One money-saving opportunity presented itself recently when the federal government placed another unfunded mandate on school districts – this one to provide additional retirement-planning services to staff. Rather than shoulder this new cost burden itself, District 129 is sharing it with School District 131.

Sharing costs with other districts is not new. In addition to the Hope D. Wall special education cooperative, the district also has a

joint busing contract with District 131 for special education students. The district is discussing savings opportunities with other neighboring districts, as well.

### Residency Verification Saves Thousands of Dollars

Strengthened residency checks are also saving the district money. More than 200 students who do not live in the district have been discovered and denied enrollment. The cost to taxpayers to educate a single student in District 129 is approximately \$8,000 a year.

### Additional Cost Savings

Also, to reduce costs and improve communication, the district has implemented a new automated substitute-teacher assignment service.

Grants and other assistance help lighten the load for taxpayers in the district. For example, the McCleery School this fall accepted the gift of a \$50,000 playground from Nestlé Pure Life and Jewel-Osco as a reward for a McCleery student winning an essay contest sponsored by the companies.



# Community Involvement

## Technology Assists Communication

The district improved its ability to provide information with the addition of new Web features, including an extensive Science curriculum resource site for students, parents and teachers.

Next year, parents will have at their fingertips more current and useful information about their children's academic work. To make this possible, the district is installing fiber-optic connections, which will allow it to operate a more powerful student information system.

## Superintendent's Community Advisory Council

Examinations of gifted education, use of time during the elementary school day, student fees and facility issues have all been discussed this fall by the Superintendent's Community Advisory Council. The Council consists of a parent from each of the District 129's 18 schools.



## Leading Through Community Service

District employees have led the way this year in three significant community service efforts -- a blood drive at West High that netted 190 pints of blood, a food drive for Aurora Area Interfaith Food Pantry that gathered 21 large boxes of food, and a team effort during the Making Strides Against Breast Cancer walk that raised more than \$8,300.



## Golden Apples Awarded

Three District 129 educators were honored in November with Golden Apple Awards. These teachers were nominated by their peers for excellence in teaching. Awards were earned by Scott Robowski, a chemistry teacher at West High; Kathy Wagner, a social studies/language arts teacher at Herget Middle School; and Kathy Gaddis, an exceptional needs classroom teacher at Hope D. Wall School.



**Six Alumni Enter West High Hall of Honor**

Six West High graduates were inducted into the Distinguished Alumni Hall of Honor on October 30. These honorees were selected by a committee of the West Aurora High School Alumni Association from dozens of nominations.

Michael Cavender – Class of 1972, Randy Shilts – Class of 1969  
 Thomas C. Ewing – Class of 1969, Phillip E. Johnson – Class of 1958  
 Richard Olson – Class of 1947, Frank H. McWethy – Class of 1901



**Nominating Petitions Available for School Board Election**

Nominating petitions for the April 7, 2009, school board election in School District 129 are now available and the circulation period has begun. Three seats on the seven-member board will be filled at the election. January 20 is the first day and January 26 is the final day that nominating petitions should be filed between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. with the school board secretary. Position on the ballot is determined by time and receipt of petitions. Should more than one petition be filed at the same time, by mail or in person, on January 20, a lottery to determine ballot order will be held at noon on February 4. Anyone interested in running for the board must be a registered voter, 18 years of age or older, and a resident of the district for at least one year. Petitions must be filed with a minimum of 50 signatures from qualified voters. The term of office is four years.

For more information or to file petitions, please contact Cindi Hamilton, Secretary to the Board of Education, (630) 301-5033, West Aurora School District 129, PO Box 4430, Aurora, IL 60507.



**A+ for District 129**

The West High Alumni Association and the Foundation for West Aurora Schools have merged forming the A+ Foundation for West Aurora Schools. More information is available at [www.sd129.org/foundation/](http://www.sd129.org/foundation/).

**Smith School Wins State Award**

The Illinois branch of the International Dyslexia Association recently awarded Smith Elementary School with its 2008 “It Takes a Village of Readers” award for providing the best approaches and curriculum for students with dyslexia. Accepting the award were Emily Barry, classroom teacher; Lisa Svejda, school psychologist; Kathy DeTolve, principal and Crysta Morrissey, School District 129’s Director of Special Education.



**West High Student Chefs Best in State**

West Aurora High School’s Culinary Arts team won first in the state on November 15 at the annual Illinois ProStart Student Invitational in Chicago. Competing for West were seniors Aaron Wirth, Tristan Porter, Pat Spoden, and Carlene Zollers. Their coach is West High Culinary Arts teacher, Shawn Barnett. The winning team will compete in April at the national competition in San Diego, California.



## Emergency School Closing Information

Schools will be open unless otherwise announced. Here is how you can find out whether district schools are closed due to inclement weather or other causes.

### TELEPHONE

A recorded message regarding any district-wide closing will be available on the District 129 Administrative Center's main line, 630-301-5000.

### WEB

Click on the district Web site: [www.sd129.org](http://www.sd129.org) or [www.emergencyclosings.com](http://www.emergencyclosings.com).

### E-MAIL

Parents who have signed up to receive school news via e-mail ([http://www.sd129.org/parents/listserve\\_signup.asp](http://www.sd129.org/parents/listserve_signup.asp)) will receive notice of a district-wide closing of schools.

### RADIO

School closing information will be made available for radio broadcasts early in the morning.

*Local radio stations that broadcast closing information are:*  
WBIG – 1280 AM    WSPY – 107.1 FM    WEVR – 95.9 FM

*Closing information will also be broadcast on:*

WGN – 720 AM	WMAQ – 670 AM
WBBM – 780 AM	Fox 32 – Channel 3 (cable)
WGN – Channel 9	CLTV – Channel 48 (cable)
CBS – Channel 2	

**Bus schedules** may need to be altered due to weather conditions. Any changes in regular bus schedules will be reported to the local stations. In extreme circumstances, there may be no service for buses, although school may be in session.

If improved weather conditions allow for **after-school activities** to be held when school has been closed for that day, notice will be posted on the district Web site by no later than 2 p.m.

When schools are closed due to an emergency, that school day (or days) will be made up at the end of the school year.

