



NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 7, 2008

Elementary Lunch Program Review Committee Offers Recommendations

The Park Ridge-Niles District 64 Elementary Lunch Program Review Committee delivered its final report to the Board of Education on April 7, and recommended a series of improvements in communication, indoor recess, program fees, staffing, and outdoor and indoor facilities. The committee was formed in late 2007 to assess satisfaction of the optional, fee-based program utilized by more than 2,100 students daily in grades 1-5 who attend the District's five elementary schools. The program was transferred this school year from the auspices of a separate non-profit corporation to direct operation by District 64.

The committee conducted separate on-line surveys during February of parents, program staff, and teachers/school personnel via the District's Web site. In all, 460 parents participated, along with 116 teachers/school personnel and 64 lunch staff members. "The review committee is very pleased with the strong participation in the surveys, and would like to thank all those who took the time to contribute," stated Superintendent Sally Pryor, who convened the group. "Many insightful, helpful suggestions were offered that will strengthen the District's operation of the program going forward," she added.

Key findings of the parent survey include:

- 79% of parents rated the lunch program either an "absolute necessity" or "very important" and felt the program was a "good value" at the early payment discount rate of 78-cents per day. However, only about one-third of parents would be willing to pay a higher fee to improve outdoor playground equipment and activities. That number increases to 40% to provide more supervisors and 43% to improve indoor recess activities.
- Although satisfaction with the lunchroom facilities, cleanliness, and playground activities was rated high by three-quarters of parents, a little more than half gave similar rankings to indoor recess options during inclement weather.
- With one adult for every 30 students, about two-thirds of parents think the number of supervisors is adequate. About three-quarters of the parents believe the supervisors are fair, caring or handle discipline issues in a positive manner.

In addition to reviewing quantitative data, the committee also reviewed hundreds of written comments submitted by parents, staff members and teachers before developing its recommendations. Dr. Pryor also noted that all principals had reviewed their building data to identify action items to be addressed at their schools.

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Highlights of the recommendations made to the Board include:

- Enhancing communication with parents through a variety of means, such as a new page on the District 64 Web site featuring generic as well as school-specific information about lunch and lunch recess routines.
- Offering a greater variety of options for indoor recess by sharing ideas among schools, stocking shorter-length light educational or entertainment programs, and increasing opportunities for active student participation and creativity.
- Streamlining the payment process by integrating lunch program fees onto the elementary student fee bill statement and considering offering on-line credit card payment.
- Providing annual training for staff on conflict resolution techniques and Civil Behavior concepts, along with ongoing training on emergency procedures.
- Surveying the current condition of grassy playing fields at all schools to identify specific locations needing work, which could be done jointly with the Park Ridge Recreation & Park District.
- Encouraging principals to work with head supervisors to develop seating options that give more flexibility for students to intermingle socially, and to vary those options more frequently during the year.

On the financial side, the committee noted that the 2007-08 budget included a transfer of more than \$100,000 from the dissolution of the Parents' Paid Lunch Program non-profit corporation. Next year, the lunch program is expected to show an operating loss of more than \$33,000, with projected 2008-09 expenditures of about \$517,000 matched against estimated annual revenues of \$484,000. The committee made no recommendation concerning the amount of fees being charged.

The committee urged the District and Board to act upon its recommendations expeditiously, so that most can be in place for the start of the 2008-09 school year, Dr. Pryor stated. Other volunteer committee members included: Marie Moran, parent, Washington School; Dana Wessel, parent, Franklin School; Liz Daley, parent, Roosevelt School; Kathy Pierucci, Field School head lunch supervisor and Roosevelt School parent; Washington School Principal Kim Nasshan; and, Roosevelt School Principal Mary Jane Cole. Program consultant Natalie Blachut, Public Information Coordinator Bernadette Tramm, and Business Manager Bruce Martin also contributed.

A copy of the committee's complete report may be found on the District 64 Web site (www.d64.org) with the April 7 Board of Education meeting materials.

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