



# THE VISION

COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER • FALL 2019

## SOCIAL + EMOTIONAL = LEARNING

*#Avocalearns Together*

Many in our community, particularly parents, have probably heard about the increasing prominence of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and its importance, especially for students' mental health. SEL is important in supporting mental health, as it promotes students better knowing their own strengths and challenges, knowing how to ask for support, knowing how to have better relations with others, and knowing how to set and achieve goals. Ultimately, in addition to those benefits, SEL empowers students to achieve more in academic learning too. This is because students who are competent at Social Emotional skills are more confident, are better at accessing resources to increase their learning, and are better at taking the types of healthy risks that lead to more learning. So SEL really is about how Social and Emotional health lead to more and better learning. In the end, SEL does not replace academic learning but supports it.



Color Crews at Avoca West is in its second year and has really taken off and is just one example of how the staff are engaging in small change with big effects. Color Crews is a way to organize students so they better connect with each other and their school. School-wide activities once a month are just one example of how Color Crews builds a sense of interconnectedness and belonging, supporting Social Emotional competency.

At Marie Murphy, the staff has embraced another strategy to support the health of our students - making lunch count. In the past, when students were struggling academically, that student would often be required to meet with a teacher during the student's lunch period.

*Continued on page 2...*





# Letter from the Superintendent

Dear Avoca Community,  
I am thrilled to now be marking my first four months as superintendent. Avoca is a unique community because it serves families not from just one or two North Shore municipalities, but four. That amalgam means Avoca has forged a culture that sets it apart, creating a “private school” sensibility while opening its doors to every student. Foremost, the academic performance of Avoca’s students is stellar, the top of all the districts sending students to New Trier and likewise among the top of school districts in Illinois (see p. 5 for more details).

Of course, academics are just one aspect that contributes to the whole child Avoca seeks to develop. Our extra curricular programs, especially in Science Olympiad and Orchestra, are among the best in the country. Likewise, during the school day in any given week our students have access to general music, foreign language, drama, visual art, tech learning, and physical education. We can focus on the whole child because of our array of learning opportunities.

But support for these opportunities cannot be taken for granted and we are facing a time when we must as a community look to establish our priorities in the face of financial challenges. Specifically, our district is running an annual operating deficit and could be unable to meet its financial obligations as soon as two years from now. See p. 3 for more details and please join me on one of the following dates to hear more about our financial situation and to provide me feedback on how we can prioritize our budget and expenditure decisions. (Tuesday, November 12 at 7:00 p.m. at Marie Murphy or Wednesday November 13 at 9 a.m. at Marie Murphy.) In total, I have four main areas of focus for my first year. They are to:

- **Demonstrate an intimate knowledge of district operations, including climate and culture.**
- **Demonstrate an in-depth knowledge of the district’s finances and make recommendations for achieving a financial state that supports our mission, vision, and values.**
- **Collaborate with the Board of Education to establish a high performing Board that fulfills its agreements and legacy.**
- **Successfully execute the Strategic Plan confirmed for the 2019-20 school year.**

*Kaine Delano*

## SEL Continued from cover...

Academics are important, and after reading the research conclusions about the importance of a restorative break at lunch, students are no longer required to see teachers during lunch. Healthier students who are given the right break during the middle of the day actually end up performing better in the long term and are more likely to identify school as a positive experience.

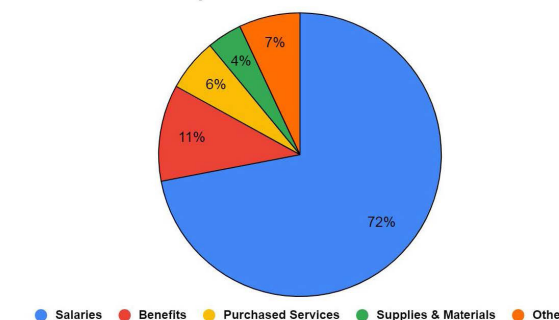
These are just two small bright examples of how we focus on “small change” related to students’ social emotional health - with big effects. Please see what else this issue of The Vision holds regarding the great work our students, staff, and parents are doing together and the challenges we currently face to “maximize the potential of each child” in District 37.

# Financial State of Avoca School District 37

For the last three years, Avoca District 37 has faced an operating deficit. For the most recent fiscal year, this deficit was 2.2%. The last operating referendum was passed 10 years ago but was only projected to last 9 years. At our current projections, we anticipate the district will not have sufficient operating reserves in two years. Specifically:

- Our operating deficit is projected to be approximately 2.5% a year
- In two years our reserves could be too low to meet our payroll needs every month
- The District is currently on a state-required deficit reduction plan

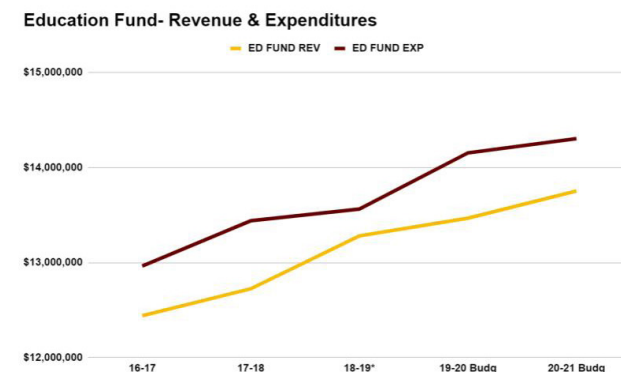
Education Fund Expense Breakdown



Steps taken to date have included:

- Not filling administrative positions
- Instituting or raising fees for extracurricular activities and student transportation
- Minimizing or deferring expenses for discretionary items

Next steps include seeking stakeholder input on budget and expenditure priorities, instituting a framework for budgeting and expenditures, seeking additional expenditure reductions, and alternative revenue sources. Because our most important resources - our certified staff - make up 83% of our Education Fund budget (our largest) - cutting expenses is challenging. We need your guidance and feedback as we move through this difficult period and are faced with challenging decisions. Please see my note on p. 2 with the dates of community meetings related to the budget and district finances.



## November Dates to Remember...

- 11th - 8:30 a.m. Veterans Day Breakfast rsvp at 847-724-6800
- 12th - 7:00 p.m. State of the District/Budget Framework Forum
- 13th - 9:00 a.m. State of the District/Budget Framework Forum
- 14th - 6:30 p.m. Board of Education Meeting
- 15th - Intercultural Night- Register at [avocaple.org/intercultural-night](http://avocaple.org/intercultural-night)





# A Message from the Board of Education...

On behalf of the Avoca District 37 Board of Education, welcome to the 2019-2020 school year! In addition to the autumn weather, significant change has occurred at Avoca as well. We began the school year with two new board members and two new administrators.

Dr. Gretchen Witte Glader joins the Board after living in the Avoca District for the past nine years. Dr. Glader is a psychotherapist and retired school social worker. Dr. Sumit Dhar is a current Avoca parent of two daughters. A scientist by training and a Professor of Hearing Science at Northwestern University, Dr. Dhar has been a member of the Avoca community since 2012. I would like to extend our deepest appreciation for the service of now retired Board members, Joel Raynes and Sheryl Swibel.

On the administration front, we have a new Director of Pupil Services, Kristen Moore. Kristen comes to Avoca after five years serving Skokie District 73 1/2 as Director of Student Services and past positions as Managing Director of Specialized Services and as a Special Education teacher.

Also joining Avoca this school year is Dr. Kaine Osburn, Avoca's new Superintendent. Dr. Osburn is a resident of Wilmette and previously served as Superintendent of Lake Zurich District 95 and Deputy Superintendent of Naperville District 203. Prior to his Superintendent experience, Dr. Osburn served as Principal and English Teacher for Niles West High School.

This summer concluded with many facility upgrades including painting, carpet and HVAC upgrade at Avoca West. At Marie Murphy we made some long-term investments with the replacement of our boilers and classroom univents.

From a strategic plan standpoint, we're now entering year four of our five-year strategic plan. Focus areas include finalizing adoption of our English Language Arts curriculum across all grade levels, enhancing our support for student's Social and Emotional needs and the long-term financial stability of the district.

I couldn't be prouder of the tireless efforts of our staff, teachers and administration to make Avoca such a special place.

*Rich [Signature]*

## Strategic Plan Spotlight

The 2019-20 school year is the fourth year of the five-year strategic plan. This year, there are a handful of areas that will be the focus of our strategic work.

As you can see, the first two areas address explicitly teaching, learning, and health. Our third area focuses on how we support students across a range of needs in every classroom. Our fourth goal relates to our current financial challenges (see p.3).



**Finalize adoption of an English Language Arts Curriculum, grades K-8**



**Support the Social Emotional needs of students across the district**



**Evaluate the continuum of student services providing support for every student**



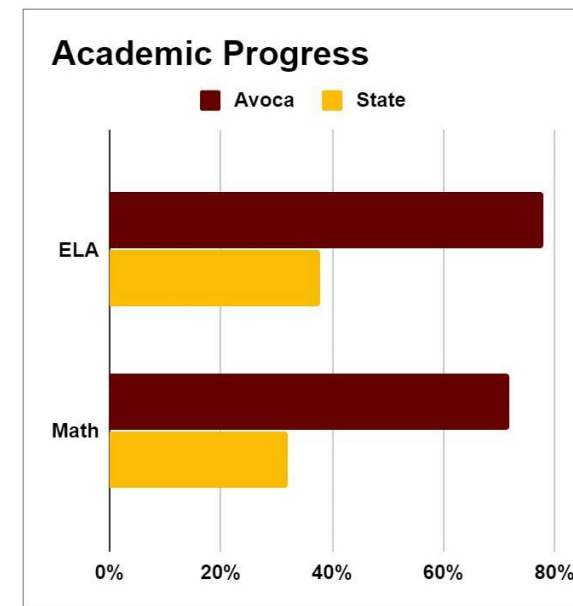
**Evaluate the financial state of the district and recommend changes that lead to financial stability**

One of Avoca's core values centers around educating the whole child. Never easy to define, we know that is not simply academics or simply extracurriculars, but more than either alone or the simple sum of their parts. Below are just some academic and extra-curricular highlights that let you know the kinds of amazing experiences students at Avoca can have, thanks to community support.

## Academic

Both Avoca schools rated in the top two of four categories - Commendable and Exemplary - in the 2019 Illinois School Report Card ratings system. On the Illinois Assessment of Readiness (IAR), Avoca students did exceptionally well, placing their achievement in the top 10% of schools state wide. Specifically:

- From grades 3-8, 70-85% of students met or exceeded state standards in English Language Arts.
- Between 60-85% met or exceeded those standards in Mathematics.
- As a point of reference, the state average in ELA for meeting and exceeding standards is 38% and the state average for Math is 32%.
- Avoca is in the top tier of New Trier districts academically.



## The Unique Potential of the Whole Child

### Extra Curricular

As mentioned on p. 2, both Avoca schools offer amazing extracurricular opportunities and we have been recognized for the value of those opportunities. Last year the National Association of Music Merchants (NAMM) Foundation recognized us as one of the best districts in America for music education. Likewise, our Science Olympiad team has won or placed among the top state finishers in Illinois for more than a decade. The New Trier Science Olympiad team that finished 8th in the country last year was made up mostly of Avoca graduates - and Avoca is among the smaller sender districts to New Trier. Additional recognition came from our local media's attention to "darklight" our student drama production that focused on student mental health.





# BIGGER than ONE

Few actions impact the world as powerfully as achieving something **solely** for others. Susan Geidner and Avoca West students are doing just that with their Trảng Bàng Library Project. In 2018, through a picture book by Margriet Ruurs titled, *My Librarian is a Camel*, students learned not all libraries have the same resources. That recognition led to students wanting to make real change for others.

A connection at Children's Library International (CLI) brought UNESCO Peace Ambassador Kim Phuc to Avoca in September. Kim is best known as the "girl in the picture" running naked from her village in Vietnam after being burned by napalm in 1972. CLI had already raised money and built 34 li-



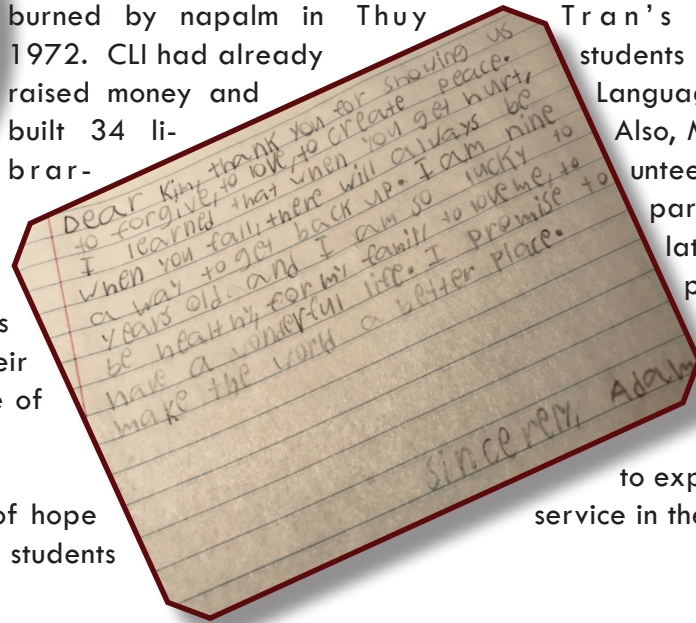
braries across Southeast Asia, and their dream, is to fulfil Kim's dream, which was to build their 35th library in her home village of Trảng Bàng.

Inspired by Kim's presentation of hope and forgiveness, Avoca West students

have focused on assisting Kim to realize her dream one small idea and a few dollars at a time. Students have served as Jr. Peace Ambassadors, participated in the "If I Built a Library" challenge and Dot Day Coin Wars, all to raise awareness and money for the Trảng Bàng library. The groundbreaking is taking place in Trảng Bàng in late October and the library will be completed by June 2020.



Avoca West teachers are devoting some class time to connect with Thuy Tran's



students from the Ross Worley English Language School in Vung Tau, Vietnam. Also, Ms. Geidner, CLI, and their volunteers are working to schedule a parent information/Q&A night later this fall featuring student projects, letters, photos, progress updates and future fundraising/donation information. The district endeavors to create opportunity for its students to experience the powerful impact of service in the community and beyond.

# small change

Over the summer, staff members read different excerpts from two books, Daniel Pink's *WHEN* and Shawn Achor's *BIG POTENTIAL*. These books offer a plethora of research-supported ways individuals can make small changes in their daily routines in order to maximize their engagement and happiness. In August the whole staff came together to collaborate around how they could engage what we are dubbing "small change." It might not **sound** inspiring, but the message embedded in Pink's and Achor's respective books are that small things done cumulatively and collaboratively usually have a bigger effect than when we only "swing for the fences" or "go it alone". Some examples of changes already undertaken by individual staff members or groups of staff members include (but are not limited to):

- Starting the day with expressions of gratitude
- Complimenting others for praising friends or colleagues
- Detaching from schoolwork during lunch time
- Physical activity immediately before taking a test
- No longer requiring a student miss lunch to meet with a teacher
- Regulating the ratio of positive to critical comments



There are more examples and the staff will be exploring more together as the year goes on, but the underlying belief is that if each staff member and student engaged in these kinds of small changes, then cumulatively the culture and climate for learning transforms dramatically over time. Stay tuned for more communications about our engagement with "small change."

# BIG CHANGE

While a raft of "small changes" can have big effects, they are not the same thing as "big change." Large-scale change requires longer time frames to contemplate, research, collectively discuss, plan and enact. Avoca 37 is a high performing district, and when the time comes, as a community we will engage in "big change" together. When? The current strategic plan ends in June 2021. So the administration plans to start the visioning and planning process - for big change - in the Fall of 2020. In the meantime, the staff is collaborating to start to consider areas where it might seek big change - around the use of time, space, energy, and engagement. Nothing can be decided around "big change" until every stakeholder has used their voice - students, staff, parents, and community members. That is a process that requires much consideration, so please stay tuned as we announce steps around that work for the Fall of 2020.



## COMMUNICATION ACROSS THE COMMUNITY

**The Vision** is one channel that we use to reach every household and business in The Avoca Community. There are others we are developing this year, both electronic and in-person. Below are the electronic channels where you can follow me or the principals at either school:

- Avoca West Principal Jessica Hutchison - @principal\_hutch on Instagram and @jesshutchisonAW on Twitter.
- Marie Murphy Principal Matt Palcer - @mariemurphyschool on Instagram and @MarieMurphySch on Twitter
- Superintendent Kaine Osburn @avocaosburn on Instagram and @AvocaOsburn on Twitter

Additionally, each principal sends out semi-weekly electronic posts that can be found on the front page of the website ([www.avoca37.org](http://www.avoca37.org)) and the superintendent sends out an additional news post every two weeks, also found on the website. The **Avoca Weekly** is a nuts-and-bolts update of all the events going on at the schools, available on the front page of the website.

Finally, in addition to the public meetings on district finances and the budget, Superintendent Osburn is committed to reaching out in person in the community, thanks to help from dedicated residents. This Fall, he has already been hosted in the homes of three residents who have personally invited hundreds of neighbors to their respective homes to meet Dr. Osburn over coffee. There will be more such opportunities in the Spring. If you are interested in hosting Dr. Osburn in your home and inviting neighbors, please contact Suzie Clampitt via email at [clampitts@avoca37.org](mailto:clampitts@avoca37.org). Stay tuned for future communications about participating in a focus-group providing feedback to the district on the effectiveness of its communications.





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## AVOCA BOARD OF EDUCATION



Back: Gil Gibori, Dan Garbis, Louise Dechovitz  
Front: Sumit Dhar, Jamie Taylor, Rick Zelinsky,  
Gretchen Witte-Glader

For information about the Board of Education,  
monthly meetings and more visit:

[WWW.AVOCA37.ORG/BOARD\\_OF\\_EDUCATION](http://WWW.AVOCA37.ORG/BOARD_OF_EDUCATION)

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## AVOCA CENTER UPDATE

The Board of Education has spent years investigating the best way to dispose of Avoca Center, located on the Marie Murphy property. After a community committee spent months taking community input and made recommendations to the Board, an opportunity did present itself regarding this property. First, the cost of restoring the building for sustained use was high, close to \$5M. Second, there was no long term and viable plan for the building that was in the best interest of students, parents, or taxpayers. But last year, Superintendent Jauch developed an arrangement for North Shore Country Day School (NSCD) to make use of athletic fields on the site of Avoca Center if the District demolished the building. In exchange for using for 16 years two IHSA regulation soccer fields to be installed on this site, NSCD contributed \$400,000, greatly reducing the expense of demolishing the building. This arrangement made it possible to eliminate any long term expense or liability associated with Avoca Center, while keeping the property under District 37 ownership in the event the District needed to use the property for its own purposes in the future.

The Avoca Center building will be demolished before the new year, new fields graded and seeded in Spring 2020, and NSCD will begin using the fields in the Fall of 2020. When not being used under the agreement with NSCD, District 37 retains the right to use these two fields for its own purposes or to rent the fields for usage by a third-party. All fields already existing on the Marie Murphy property continue to be controlled solely by District 37.



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