

**Minutes of Gurnee School District 56  
Board of Education Meeting  
February 25, 2026**

The following Board members were in attendance: Odie Pahl, Mark Pos, Cesar Garcia, Jim Blockinger, Becky Kotsinis, Mandi Florip, and Germain Castellanos (absent)

Also in attendance:

Luis Correa, Superintendent  
Martin Da Costa, Director of Business | CSBO  
Eric Esteban, Director of Technology  
Pete Helfers, Director of Curriculum & Instruction  
Sean Smith, Director of Facilities & Grounds  
Rachel Solomon, Director of Student Services  
Miriam Torres, Multilingual & Assessment Coordinator  
Principals: Dominique Geocaris, Jen Glickley, Sara Roscheeger, and Allison Waller  
Aurora Orozco, Board Clerk

Board President Pos called the regular meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. and asked that everyone join him in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

Dr. Glickley introduced Rebecca Grazier, 2nd/3rd Grade Teacher at River Trail School, who was named the 2026 Far North Suburbs Regional Teacher of the Year. Dr. Glickley highlighted Ms. Grazier's dedication to her students, commitment to instructional excellence, and positive impact on the River Trail school community. The Board congratulated Ms. Grazier on this outstanding achievement.

Dr. Correa introduced Dr. Lisa West as the new Director of Curriculum & Instruction, effective July 1, 2026. Dr. West currently serves as Principal at North Barrington Elementary School in Barrington Community Unit School District 220, where she is part of the district's strategic planning team. She previously served as a school principal in Woodland School District 50. Dr. West began her career in elementary education at Glencoe School District 35, where she taught fifth and sixth grades. Board President Pos welcomed Dr. West to Gurnee School District 56 and expressed the Board's enthusiasm for working with her.

Board Member Florip made a motion with a second from Board President Pos to accept the minutes from the regular meeting on January 28, 2026, as presented. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Jim Blockinger, Mandy Florip, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, and Mark Pos.

The regular January 31, 2026, Treasurer's Report identified cash and investments of \$25,339,941.84. The Revenue Report identified receipts of \$1,179,787.15, and the Expenditure Report identified expenses totaling \$2,636,162.16. The cash balance in the Activity Fund for January was \$112,691.51. The Financial Reports, plus the

Revised January (\$1,943,293.49) and Regular February (\$1,847,878.22) Bills for Payment Reports, were approved on a motion by Board Member Blockinger and seconded by Board Member Pahl. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Jim Blockinger, Mandy Florip, Odie Pahl, Cesar Garcia, and Mark Pos.

During the Public Participation portion of the meeting, Debbie Handler, River Trail School Librarian and Certified Union President, addressed the Board. Ms. Handler thanked the Board for their time, service, and commitment to the district, noting that she believes the district operates from a place of good intentions and shares the common goal of providing the best possible education and support for students. She expressed staff concerns regarding transparency, communication, and the pace of recent changes. While noting that change itself is not the primary concern, she stated that the speed of implementation and limited opportunities for partnership and input have, at times, led to uncertainty among staff. She also encouraged Board members to continue asking questions, both during meetings and directly with those working in the schools, and to visit district buildings when possible to engage with staff and students.

Dr. Correa requested that each building principal provide the Board of Education with highlights that had occurred at their building since the previous Board of Education meeting. This included pictures from:

Viking: 8<sup>th</sup> Viking School students in the 8th Grade Digital Literacy class designed and constructed wooden structures as part of a hands-on engineering project. Students tested the strength of their designs by adding incremental weight to determine how much each structure could hold before collapsing. This activity provided students with an applied, experiential learning opportunity integrating design, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills. Students also engaged in experiential learning opportunities through the intervention reading program to support literacy development. Additionally, bilingual teachers Isabel Iniguez and Tammy Paterson Gillespie attended the IRC Conference in early December. Upon returning, they shared professional learning with the entire Viking staff, focused on text engineering strategies.

River Trail: The Sweetheart Dance was held as a fundraiser for the Great American Program. The event included photo opportunities, dancing, and games, and was well attended by students and families. On Fat Tuesday, staff participated in the annual Rock, Paper, Scissors competition held throughout the school day, with finalists competing at the end of the day. This year's champion was Rebecca Grazier. In recognition of Black History Month, middle school students presented projects to their classmates and to younger students, highlighting notable individuals and contributions that have shaped history and culture.

Prarire Trail: Mrs. Geathouse and the school social workers provided professional development focused on advocacy versus disrespect and strategies for proactive

classroom management. During the Institute Day, staff focused on strengthening the school's work as a Professional Learning Community (PLC) and continued participation in teacher instructional rounds. The school community also celebrated the 100th Day of School, recognized recipients of the Gurnee Young Citizenship Award, and participated in Jersey Day as part of ongoing student engagement activities.

Spaulding: During the recent Teacher Institute Day, several teachers attended professional development sessions at SEDOL and other nearby conferences. Teachers who remained in the district participated in a full-day workshop led by Dr. Cooper from the Center for Responsive Schools. Dr. Cooper, a principal from a school similar in size to Spaulding, focused on building joyful learning communities within classrooms. The workshop emphasized actionable strategies, maintaining concise communication, and understanding the importance of purposeful silence in instruction. As part of PBIS initiatives, students participated in "Donuts with a Detective" at Spaulding, where a local detective engaged students in discussion and expanded on PBIS themes. Students also attended a recent assembly featuring Rhyming Plus, where they engaged in storytelling activities and shared their work with peers.

Dr. Correa shared photographs from the recent Movie Night event hosted by the PTO. The event provided an opportunity for students and families to come together in a positive and engaging school community setting.

Mrs. Miriam Torres shared that the One-Way Dual Language second-grade class at Spaulding celebrated a pizza party in recognition of student growth on the i-Ready Diagnostic assessment. Students in all dual language classes complete two diagnostic assessments—one in Spanish to measure reading growth in Spanish and one in English to measure reading growth in English. Mrs. Torres highlighted the significant progress demonstrated by the second-grade students. From fall to winter, students showed substantial gains on the English diagnostic assessment, with growth ranging from 20 to 60 points. She noted that when learning a second language, students often develop stronger skills in their primary language first, with second-language development progressing more gradually. However, the results indicate parallel growth in both Spanish and English, reflecting the effectiveness of the dual language instructional model.

Dr. Correa shared photographs from the Prairie Trail 5th Grade Band Concert.

Middle School Resource Adoption: Mr. Helfers will provide a brief explanation of the resource adoption process for the middle school English Language Arts resource. Mr. Pete Helfers presented the Middle School English Language Arts curriculum review and recommendation on behalf of the district committee. He outlined the comprehensive review process, which began in Summer 2024 with alignment to the district's Comprehensive Literacy Plan and included resource previews, pilot implementations, and evaluation using edReports, the Lake County ROE guidance, and the district's evaluation framework. The committee reviewed several programs, including Amplify CKLA, Savvas MyPerspectives, Read Side by Side, McGraw-Hill StudySync, and HMH

Into Literature. Based on pilot feedback, instructional alignment, and overall program quality, the committee recommended adoption of HMH Into Literature.

Mr. Sean Smith presented an update on the District's ground-mounted solar panel system at Prairie Trail School. The project was approved in August 2020, constructed in 2021, and became operational in January 2022. Mr. Smith reviewed system capacity, energy production data, environmental impact metrics, equipment life expectancy, and ongoing maintenance procedures. He also discussed the ComEd credit structure, invoicing trends, electric delivery costs, and projected long-term cost recovery. Recent inspection results were noted, and Board members asked questions regarding system performance, financial impact, and sustainability benefits.

At this time, Dr. Correa requested that each administrator report on department projects/tasks that they were currently focused on:

Mr. Da Costa: Mr. Da Costa provided an update on collective bargaining discussions with the support staff union, including proposed updates to insurance rates for support staff.

Mr. Helpers: Mr. Helpers reminded the Board that February is Black History Month. He also shared that the Maker Faire is scheduled for March 19 and the Asian American celebration is planned for April 19. He reported that the science unit design work is nearly completed.

Mrs. Solomon: It was reported that attendance at a recent professional session focused on responding to incidents and key safety protocols. Several important lessons were learned and will be incorporated into the district's reunification procedures. Additionally, early childhood and preschool transition conversations have begun to support planning and student readiness.

Ms. Torres: Mrs. Torres had the opportunity to attend the National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE) Conference, where I gained valuable insights into best practices, advocacy, and instructional strategies for multilingual learners. The sessions provided meaningful guidance on supporting English learners academically and socially, especially as state requirements and accountability measures continue to evolve. We are currently concluding ACCESS testing and preparing for the upcoming Illinois Assessment of Readiness (IAR). As part of this transition, Mrs. Torres has been working on training staff on the new testing dashboard to ensure accurate implementation, compliance, and data monitoring throughout the assessment window. In addition, Mrs. Torres has collaborating with the Multilingual Coordinator at the high school to meet with families of 8th-grade multilingual learners. The goal of these meetings is to inform families about the services, supports, and programming available at the high school level, ensuring a smooth transition and continued academic success for our students.

Mr. Smith: All preventive maintenance on the HVAC systems has been completed. The department is continuing to assess and address winter-related damage, including roofing concerns, plumbing issues, and kitchen equipment repairs.

The department is currently planning for the bid opening on March 9. Following the bid review process, the recommendation will be presented to the Board in April for approval.

Mr. Esteban: The department is currently working on the E-Rate project, which includes upgrading the district's network infrastructure. As part of this initiative, we are engaged in ongoing discussions regarding enhanced network security and broader district-wide cybersecurity measures to ensure data protection and system integrity. In addition, testing season is approaching, and are preparing the systems and staff to ensure a smooth and secure administration process.

Dr. Correa requested that the Board of Education make the Professional Leave and Conferences report a matter of record in the minutes of the regular February 25, 2026, Board of Education meeting.

A Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request was received by Dr. Luis Correa via email on February 2, 2026, from Mrs. Karen Garcia (SmartProcure) requesting all current employee/staff contact information. The specific information requested from our record-keeping system is: 1. First Name, 2. Last Name, 3. Position Title, 4. Department, 5. Direct Phone Number (if it does not exist, list main phone number with extension), 6. Business Cell Phone (if provided by Gurnee School District No. 56), 7. Email Address, 8. Office Address (Address, City, State, Zip).

Mrs. Orozco responded to Mrs. Gracia by email on February 10, 2026, with the requested information.

A second Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request was received by Dr. Luis Correa via email on February 4, 2026, from Mr. Oshea Smith (Sunlightaccess) requesting copies of the most recent contracts, agreements, amendments, and renewals by Gurnee School District 56 from January 1, 2021, through January 29, 2026, in connection with the following vendors: Mastery Prep, Albert.io, IXL, Edgenuity, Khan Academy, Jumpstart, Texas College Bridge, Kaplan, Princeton Review.

Mrs. Orozco responded to Mr. Smith by email on February 9, 2026, with the requested information.

On a motion from Board President Pos with a second from Board Member Pahl, the Board voted to approve Board policies under review (Policies 6:230, 6:235) and to adopt those policies as presented by the administration. Motion carried on a roll call

vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Jim Blockinger, Mandy Florip, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, and Mark Pos.

Dr. Correa provided the Board of Education with a group of policies to review to ensure that those policies reflected the intent of the Board. This was a goal of the Board made during training provided by the Illinois Association of School Boards (IASB). Ultimately, all Board policies would be reviewed during a three-year cycle. Current policies for review are 6:290, 6:340, 7:150, 7:160, 7:170 and 7:180. The Board would officially approve the recommended changes at the next Board of Education meeting.

Board Member Kotsinis made a motion to approve the following items as presented on the consent agenda. Board Member Garcia seconded the motion.

- River Trail School Great America Fundraising Request
- River Trail School Team Lead Fundraising Request
- Viking Middle School PBIS Fundraising Request

Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Jim Blockinger, Mandy Florip, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, and Mark Pos.

During the *Public Comment* portion of the meeting, no one wished to address the Board of Education.

On a motion by Board Member Kotsinis and seconded by Board President Pos, the Board voted to adjourn open session at 6:00 p.m. The Board went into closed session at 6:06 p.m. to discuss the following items on a roll call vote:

- The appointment, employment, compensation, discipline, performance, or dismissal of specific employees of the District or legal counsel for the District, including hearing testimony on a complaint lodged against an employee or against legal counsel for the District, to determine its validity. 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(1), as amended by P.A. 93-0057.
- Student disciplinary cases. 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(9).
- The placement of individual students in special education programs and other matters relating to individual students. 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(10).
- Litigation, when an action against, affecting or on behalf of the particular District has been filed and is pending before a court or administrative tribunal, or when the District finds that an action is probable or imminent, in which case the basis for the finding shall be recorded and entered into the closed meeting minutes. 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(11).
- Discussion of lawfully closed meeting minutes, whether for purposes of approval by the body of the minutes or semi-annual review of the minutes as mandated by Section 2.06. 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(21).

Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Jim Blockinger, Mandy Florip, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, and Mark Pos.

The Board of Education came out of closed session at 6:53 p.m. on a motion from Board President Pos and seconded by Board Member Kotsinis. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Jim Blockinger, Mandy Florip, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, and Mark Pos.

On a motion from Board Member Florip, with a second from Board Member Garcia, the Board voted to approve the Resignation Agreement and Release between Raanan Burg and the Board of Education, as presented. Roll Call: Ayes: Jim Blockinger, Mandy Florip, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, and Mark Pos.

On a motion from Board Member Florip, with a second from Board Member Garcia, the Board voted to approve the termination of support staff employee Yolanda Vega, pending legal review for cause, effective immediately as presented. Roll Call: Ayes: Jim Blockinger, Mandy Florip, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, and Mark Pos.

On a motion from Board President Pos, with a second from Board Member Pahl, the Board voted to approve the personnel recommendations as presented by the Superintendent. Roll Call: Ayes: Jim Blockinger, Mandy Florip, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, and Mark Pos.

On a motion from Board Member Pahl with a second from Board President Pos, the Board voted to approve closed session minutes for the meeting on January 28, 2026, as presented. Roll Call: Ayes: Jim Blockinger, Mandy Florip, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, and Mark Pos.

On a motion from Board Member Blockinger with a second from Board Member Pahl, the Board indicated that closed session minutes from July 2025 through December 2025 were reviewed and that all minutes, including those prior to this date group, continue to require confidential treatment. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Jim Blockinger, Mandy Florip, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, and Mark Pos.

A motion was made by Board President Pos and seconded by Board Member Kotsinis to adjourn the meeting at 6:53 p.m. Motion carried on a roll call vote. Roll Call: Ayes: Jim Blockinger, Mandy Florip, Odie Pahl, Becky Kotsinis, Cesar Garcia, and Mark Pos.

Respectfully submitted:

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Mark Pos, President

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Odie Pahl, Secretary  
Board of Education, District #56  
Lake County, IL