



NSSEO Special Summer 2023 Newsletter

A Special Blend of Celebrations, Transitions and Gratitude

So many wonderful celebrations and transitions to celebrate as we close the 2022-2023 school year and so much to look forward to as NSSEO continues to build on success and plan for the future. This special edition will include several of the highlights and important organizational priorities.

2022-2023 End-of-Year Highlights

NSSEO's desired state for the future, our vision for the organization, is "*enhancing students' talents and dreams for a promising future*" are celebrated with great pride, emotion and school-family partnerships through each of the specially designed graduation ceremonies across NSSEO. This year was quite special for so many reasons - amazing student accomplishments, heartfelt speeches by parents, students, leaders and Board members and special videos reflecting the heart of the work and the bittersweet reality that many students and a few staff and leaders are heading on to new adventures.

Special Milestones - Graduation Highlights across NSSEO

Kirk Transition Graduation



This year the dedicated Kirk graduation planning committee designed the transition graduation for students aging out of their educational career at Kirk as an opportunity to celebrate with family in a special ceremony that highlighted student messages, joining with family and staff and a wonderful celebratory vibe while the impressive group of students enjoyed pizza and treats to bask in the success of their efforts. Mr. Weems

presented their final gifts and certificates and highlighted their success and plans for post-secondary focus. It had a beautiful blend of joy, fun and appreciation of courage, tenacity and growth. We wish our Kirk graduates the very best in their life journeys and will miss their smiling faces around Kirk Campus.



Kirk High School Graduation

With so many Kirk High School graduates heading on to transition, the graduation ceremony reflected special highlights, parent speakers, proud Kirk leaders and our NSSEO Board president Anna Klimkowicz sharing a very touching message of pride, hope and congratulations for amazing efforts, accomplishments and goals for the years ahead. Students demonstrated their growth through speeches and leading the ceremony in the pledge. The pride, resilience, and dedicated support of a Kirk team was reflected in every aspect of this special celebration and the weeks and years that paved the way.



Miner School Graduation

Miner graduations always possess such a beautiful blend of laughter, tears and pride and this year and this year it reached the greatest of heights as we said good-bye to special students moving on to high school, heard a heartfelt speech of gratitude from NSSEO Governing Board Vice President Robert Rognstad, special parents tearfully thanking an amazing team and an emotional farewell and congratulations speech from Principal Erik Brekke. Students proudly walking up to receive their diplomas and celebrating with staff and families made this a wonderful culmination of an incredible year.



Timber Ridge School Graduation



Principal Mike Wagrowski and Asst. Principal Nancy Milne led a very special graduation committee in planning a student-centered graduation reflecting the heart and vision of the Timber Ridge School Community. All attending this special evening heard strong, confident messages from students and proud staff. Several TR alumni staff returned to engage and cheer on students in this special ceremony. The pride, accomplishments, personalized awards and ambitious goals for their secondary journey were so moving throughout the evening. As Principal Wagrowski wished all TR graduates the very best, everyone heard the reaffirming support as he shared - once a wolf always a wolf - inviting students back to share their future success and support future students.



Miner Roll & Stroll

Another great school-family partnership event on a perfect May afternoon raised important funds to support the Miner community. Miner Roll and Stroll raised over \$2600 and was the best turnout to date! The funds will support additional sensory support at Miner. The love, pride and support were bright as the sunny day we had for such a special cause.



Kirk Campus Student Market - Micro-Businesses with Big Impact

On Saturday, May 20th students and staff held their 2nd annual Kirk Student Market attracting families and community members to learn more about the many student-centered micro-businesses. The market included a wide range of great student-made products that included buttons, magnets, banners, kindness kits, dog treats, plants, beautiful cards, custom stickers sugar scrubs, bracelets, 3-D printed labels and refreshments. Several micro-businesses led by over 30 students were 'sold out' in just a few hours! Kirk students will continue to promote their businesses online through the NSSEO/Kirk website and future markets. Vocational skills are an important ongoing emphasis for NSSEO transition planning and everyone involved embraced the success of our students' dedicated vocational efforts.



Timber Ridge Annual Golf Outing to Support TR Graduates

The 12th Annual Timber Ridge Golf Outing continues to be a great way to relax and have fun while raising funds that support the Timber Ridge Scholarship Fund, which provides past Timber Ridge students who have successfully completed their high school education, a financial start to begin their vocational and college futures. Over the last 12 years, we have raised over \$60,000 of which we have awarded 17 students with educational scholarships. Two special TR Scholarship recipients, Dylan Warner (former District 21 student) & Nicolette Lembke (former District 26 student) graduated from The Academy at Forest View, District 214. What they have accomplished academically and socially is no small feat but rather a product of hard work and the culmination of great efforts one goal at a time and will continue to be their compass for their life journeys. Both students will

be attending Harper College in the fall and pursuing career goals and the TR and NSSEO community is so proud of their continuing success.



New Journeys Ahead for NSSEO Leaders

This summer a few of our NSSEO leaders are heading off to new exciting roles aligned to their career aspirations. Christy Crabtree has led NSSEO in advancing the very comprehensive continuous improvement plan, expanded customized district partnerships through advanced Adaptive Schools and Cognitive Coaching training and developed the NSSEO RTO plan through a detailed committee process. Her efforts have had a tremendous impact on the growth and depth of the comprehensive CIP plans and action steps to accomplish short and long-term goals at NSSEO. We are excited to continue

many exciting initiatives with Christy and have benefitted immensely from her leadership and insights into this important work.



Principal Erik Brekke has been an amazing, passionate and extraordinarily talented leader at Miner over the last several years and has led a remarkable transformation after a program redesign and the many associated challenges of the pandemic. Miner is a vibrant, comprehensive and special program individually tailoring programs to meet the needs of students. He will be greatly missed, but we know that Erik will always be a part of our NSSEO community and a dear friend and colleague in our field.

Christine Pasquesi has been in a few leadership roles at NSSEO and has always been willing to pitch in and help with projects and has led the related services coordination for the past year. She will also be a neighbor working in one of the member districts and we look forward to continued collaboration. At our recent Board meeting, we recognized these incredible leaders for their passion, dedication and positive and talented contributions to NSSEO.

Welcoming New NSSEO Leaders



As we wish our outgoing leaders the best in their future endeavors, we are so excited to have several new talented and enthusiastic leaders join the NSSEO leadership team:

Dr. Tiffanie Jeffrey, the new principal at Miner School, Lori Sandler, the new Related Services Coordinator, and Kelley Rowlen, the new Assistant Principal at Kirk School. These three leaders join the NSSEO leadership team with experience, enthusiasm and excitement as they work through transition activities for a smooth succession.

Dr. Meg Schnoor has been transitioning to her new role as incoming NSSEO Superintendent starting the first week in July 2023. She has enjoyed meeting students, families, staff and district partners and has embraced the welcoming NSSEO community through participation in meetings and special events. When interviewed by students at Kirk, she shared her lifelong goals of helping students succeed and we know she will continue to advance this important work.



June Board Meeting Highlights

Such a Bright Shining Star - Moreen Mandozzi

In a very special turnabout of recognition from a student to a staff member, a bright student with talent, tenacity and a visual impairment, Louise gave a beautiful, heartfelt speech of admiration and gratitude to Moreen Mandozzi, the D25 vision program assistant for her long-term dedication to D25 and most recently to the vision program, learning braille and several assistive technology supports that helped her best support the students. Moreen's amazing attitude and eagerness to learn 'all things vision' made a significant difference in the lives and educational growth of the students she worked with. As she retires, her impact on the students and educational community will be felt long after her last day at work.



“The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or touched - they must be felt with the heart.” Helen Keller

Special Recognition - D/HH Student Scholarship Award Winners

The Hersey D/HH Alumni Scholarship awarded two special students, Nadia Puentes and Diana Nava, with checks in recognition of their educational accomplishments.



NSSEO Safety Fair - Miner School

Another special event that occurred in May was a very engaging collaborative event that brought together the Arlington Height Police and Fire Departments, the Illinois Cook County State’s Attorney’s Office, Northwest Central Dispatch, staff and volunteers to provide a great day of learning for students focused on safety. Julie Jilek, Assistant Superintendent for Business Services, highlighted the many contributions to a successful safety fair. She recognized Sheri VanOverloop, Carolyn Bielawski, and Gia Gratziana from Northwest Central Dispatch who have actively participated every year helping students gain a greater understanding of the importance of safety across all environments.

NSSEO Continuous Improvement Plan: Goal 2 - Social-Emotional Learning NSSEO RTO Plan 23-24

Asst. Superintendent Christy Crabtree presented the completed 2023-2024 NSSEO RTO plan to the NSSEO Governing Board before submitting it to ISBE this month. In the presentation, Christy highlighted the committee process, the efforts and the customization of a plan that although it is not required for cooperatives has become a very important process aligned to our CIP. The multiple points of intervention reviewed and refined throughout the year include

1. Ensure all NSSEO staff are familiar with the RTO reduction plan values, outcomes, and action plans to support ongoing cultural change related to RTO
2. Maintain the expanded number of NVCI and Ukeru trainers and training/practice opportunities including role play and problem solving
3. Develop and implement a comprehensive onboarding, training, and mentoring plan re: NVCI, Ukeru, de-escalation, TIP, SEL, FBA-BIP, understanding of behavior, and in-the-moment problem solving
4. Continue implementation of plans to improve frequency, impact, and carry-over of debriefing within each program combined with individualized student planning (FBA-BIP) for students with repeated RTO
5. Engage in ongoing research and collaborative dialogue to identify and pilot additional alternatives to RTO that might be effective within NSSEO settings

NSSEO Governing Board Changes for 2023-2024

NSSEO welcomed the newest Governing Board member, Elizabeth Nierman from D25. Elizabeth participated in a specially designed board orientation prior to the meeting and is excited and appreciative to be the representative for D25 and work with such a special Board committed to students with special needs across the NSSEO community.

After the NSSEO Board Nomination Committee completed their efforts, a slate for the 23-24 Board Officers was presented and unanimous support for the new leadership team - Robert Rognstad as President, Anna Klimkowicz as Vice President and Deb McAtee as Secretary. The newly seated Board leadership will work closely with Dr. Meg Schnoor as they continue the important transitions over the summer.

Specially-Designed NSSEA Gift of Appreciation

A special gift reflecting the shared passion of our work was presented to Dr. Judy Hackett at the Board meeting by NSSEA. NSSEA President Eileen Bell, Meghan Cassady and Joy Borkowski expressed sincere appreciation for the many accomplishments and the focus on student needs through some significant changes and milestones for NSSEO. This very touching gift is a compilation of t-shirts from every program and special NSSEO event. It

will be a special support and nostalgic blanket reflecting so many special memories over the years of this special organization.



Special Note of Gratitude

As I head into retirement after decades of work in special education, this special note of gratitude is extended to our NSSEO community for all the special ways you have influenced my life. I am so proud and inspired by the heart and efforts across our NSSEO community every day that influences students and families in such positive, impactful ways. I am forever humbled by the impactful lessons I have learned from our students and families - the courage, resilience, family love and priorities and the pure joy of small, meaningful steps. The very touching gift of the recent dedication of the Parent Education Resource Center (PERC) from the NSSEO Governing Board has meant the world to me as our families are the core reason that this work matters so deeply. Their courage and needs have inspired me to stand up and speak up, to find my voice and boldly speak up, over and over again on behalf of our students. The PERC will continue to be a place and connection for families to network, learn and grow together as partners in the educational journey.

I have been so incredibly blessed to have the unwavering support and dedication of our NSSEO Governing Board and their dedication, insights, support and guidance will continue to keep NSSEO vibrant and progressive, strong and meaningful. Our Board contributes daily for the purest reasons – helping students and families and it has been such a joy and honor to work with such thoughtful, kind and special Board members. Our district leaders and boards are extraordinary and the visionary efforts, talents and collaboration across our districts have had an immense impact on me and NSSEO. We are focused on creating and refining the world to make it more inclusive, supportive and meaningful for our students and for all of us.

NSSEO is a special place of continuous growth and focus on improvement, a place of love and caring for each other and for all of our students. It is a place that emulates respect and support for such special students, the pride of learning new skills, finding our voices and impacting the world. I wish our NSSEO community continued joy and purpose and the reality that as we continue in a commitment of service to such special students, the intrinsic rewards we reap are far greater than what we give.



With a grateful heart,

Judy Hackett



"Be bold enough to use your voice, brave enough to listen to your heart, and strong enough to live the life you've always imagined."

- Unknown



NSSEO Governing Board and Dr. Hackett- PERC Dedication, 6.27.2

Continued Focus on Recruitment and Hiring

NSSEO has continued the recruiting and hiring efforts and there are still a few available positions for the upcoming year that are posted for the upcoming 2023-24 school year. [Click this link to check out any job vacancies.](#)

Upcoming NSSEO Events:

- NSSEO Governing Board Meeting
- New Staff Orientation Week
- Staff Institute Days
- First Day of School

- Date/Time**
8/2/23 @ 7:00 pm
8/8-8/11
8/14-8/16
8/17/23

Making a Difference

NSSEO is continually looking for ways to expand partnerships with parents, districts, community leaders, and legislators to join together as a community committed to deepening understanding and positively impacting NSSEO students and families. To learn more about how to make a difference visit us at **Make A Difference** as well as on our social media platforms:

Twitter @NSSEO_org Facebook @NSSEO Instagram NSSEO_org