



# D48 UPDATE

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE COMMUNITY OF SALT CREEK SCHOOL DISTRICT 48 • FALL 2026

*Teaching Tomorrow's Leaders*

## FROM LOG CABIN TO THREE MODERN SCHOOLS OF THE FUTURE

D48 HAS BEEN A CENTER OF EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE FOR 190 YEARS

The start of this school year marked 190 years since Salt Creek School District 48 began educating its first students – in an old log cabin on a farm. Since then, the District has evolved to meet the needs of a growing community, building a rich legacy of educational excellence, resilience and fiscal responsibility.

Today, D48, one of the oldest school districts in DuPage County, serves 500 students in three schools that have been updated and expanded to accommodate modern learning, accessibility and security needs. Many of the renovations have taken place over the past two years, thanks to the successful 2024 referendum and the District's Safe Schools | Secure Futures initiative. The recent projects brought transformational change that included secure entrances, better traffic flow and parking, additional space for music and STEM, reconfigured and improved learning spaces, and upgraded infrastructure.

The District is recognizing its history and progress with a new theme – “Teaching Tomorrow’s Leaders Since 1836” – and a logo that commemorates

the 190th anniversary, along with the country’s 250th birthday. There are plans to celebrate these milestones throughout the year.

The celebrations kicked off in September with a Community Showcase at each school. The events, which doubled as curriculum nights, gave current school families, residents, alumni and local officials a chance to walk through the refreshed buildings and see how far their schools have come. The

events also served as a way to thank everyone who supported the referendum, which funded critical interior and exterior projects that will enable the District to better serve students today and for years to come.

This school year is about honoring where the District has been and the history within its walls, while celebrating its investment in the future and the effort to educate the next generations of students and leaders.



*Community Showcases held in September at each school included ribbon cuttings to unveil and celebrate the recent renovations and improvements. On the left in the new Albright gym (from left): Julie Jilek and Kelly Pangle, D48; Adam Dickens, Board member; Ashley Luzietti, D48; Dane Cuny, Board president; Stacy Rattana, Board member; and Dr. Emily Burnett and Dr. Amy Zaher, D48. On the right at Swartz: the Swartz staff.*

## THE EVOLUTION OF A SCHOOL DISTRICT

### 1836 Log Cabin Origins

Miss Mary Fuller begins teaching the first students in a vacated log cabin on the Torode Farm.

### 1916 Two-Room School

A simple frame school is built at Roosevelt and Butterfield, serving the expanding rural population.

### 1950s & 1960s Suburban Expansion

Swartz School (1954) and Albright Middle School (1959) open to support a massive 500% enrollment boom.

### 2024-2026 Building for the Next Era

The passage of a \$48M bond enables D48 to provide secure, modernized schools for the future.

# D48 INFO

## ADMINISTRATION

Dr. Amy M. Zaher  
Superintendent of Schools

Dr. Emily Burnett  
Assistant Superintendent

Ms. Julie Jilek, CSBO  
Director of Operations & Business  
Services/District Treasurer

Matt Ryan  
Director of Technology

## BOARD OF EDUCATION

Dane Cuny  
President

James Van De Velde  
Vice President

Stacy Rattana  
Secretary

Adam Dickens  
John Downer  
Ray Kielminski  
Paul Rattana

## MISSION

The Salt Creek School District 48 community promotes the rigorous development of all our students and inspires them to learn, grow, lead and succeed in a global society.

## SOCIAL MEDIA

Follow D48 on Facebook,  
Instagram and X.



## HELLO FROM DR. ZAHER

We are so honored to recognize District 48's 190th birthday this school year – a huge and impressive milestone and a cause for celebration! I am proud to be your superintendent at this exciting time, as we pay tribute to the District's long history and exciting progress.

Thanks to everyone who joined the Community Showcases in September. We were pleased to show off the work we've done over the past two years. All three schools are now more secure and more accessible, with enhanced learning spaces and grade-level configurations that are beneficial to students. And, of course, we have an incredible new gym at Albright!

D48 had another busy summer, as crews worked on interior projects throughout the schools. I am grateful to the administrative team, teachers and staff for being flexible and supportive as we completed the construction. The inconvenience was worth it – the schools are refreshed, updated and looking great. Thanks to the crews who finished the work in time to welcome students back.

Another highlight this year is the rollout of our new English Language Arts curriculum for kindergarten through eighth grade. The materials are comprehensive and tailored, building literacy, reading comprehension, writing skills and critical thinking for each grade level. We feel it is essential to focus on these fundamentals, while also incorporating technology and digital tools into the school day. In fact, this is a major theme in D48 – read more in the story about getting back to basics, on P. 3.

As I start my fourth year as superintendent, I am filled with gratitude for the opportunity to lead this school



*Dr. Amy Zaher and her team welcomed local police and fire leaders for the District's Safety Meeting, an annual opportunity to review practices and strengthen the partnerships that help keep students, staff and the schools safe. Elmhurst Police Chief Michael McLean, an Albright alum, attended the meeting and had the chance to see his alma mater's new gym.*

district and for all we have accomplished together in such a short time.

None of this progress would be possible without the unwavering dedication of our Board of Education members. They volunteer countless hours, bring incredible vision and work tirelessly behind the scenes to support students, staff and families. I particularly want to thank James Blair, who resigned from the Board for personal reasons. Paul Rattana, who previously served as a Board member, has been appointed to fill that position. Welcome back, Paul! I am deeply thankful for the Board's continued leadership, advocacy and strong partnership in ensuring our District is well-positioned for a bright future.

Dr. Amy M. Zaher  
Superintendent of Salt Creek District 48



## HAPPY FALL!

Students collected candy for Fall Fest, a free districtwide event that took place on Oct. 14 at Salt Creek. The annual tradition includes trick or treating, pumpkin decorating, games and more. The District thanks the students who donated candy and all of the school families who attended and made it such a fun and festive night.



## FOR MANY SCHOOLS, WHAT'S OLD IS NEW AGAIN...BUT D48 HAS ALWAYS KNOWN THE VALUE OF GETTING BACK TO THE BASICS

As the District celebrates its 190th birthday and looks back on its rich history, administrators and teachers are stressing the importance of striking a balance between modern, technology-enabled learning and the classic foundational elements of education – like reading, writing and recess. Yes, recess!

This is part of a nationwide conversation about the value of getting back to the basics, and the ideas are gaining traction. But at D48, they never went away.

**Reading and writing here to stay:** D48 believes in finding the right digital tools to enhance teaching and learning, and is also exploring how artificial intelligence has applications in an educational setting. But teachers remain committed to ensuring there is adequate time spent on reading, writing and even handwriting. These lessons promote critical thinking skills, cognitive development, empathy and more. That's why the new English Language Arts curriculum that rolled out this year emphasizes reading sufficiently complex texts, thinking deeply about subject matter and putting those thoughts into writing – sometimes even with paper and pencil! Nothing demonstrates the value of "getting back to basics" quite like that.

**Rewards of recess:** After decades of schools reducing recess to allow more time for academics, there has been a national movement to bring it back. Several states have passed laws to protect or restore play time and physical activity. But in D48, recess has always been on the schedule. The schools have daily recess for students through eighth grade, even though it is only required through fifth. D48 recognizes that children need opportunities to move, socialize, play and problem solve. Studies show that recess increases classroom motivation, boosts academic performance, improves behavior, reduces stress, teaches social skills and can even lead to better attendance.

**No cell phones:** Illinois now has a

state law mandating restrictions on cell phone use during school. This is another area where D48 has been ahead of the curve. No phones, smart watches, smart glasses or wireless headphones are allowed – devices must be turned off and stored the entire day, including lunch and recess. These restrictions eliminate distractions, reduce behavioral issues and promote better mental health. It is much more beneficial for students to be focused on learning and each other than their screens.

**Tech tools:** Getting back to the basics does not mean technology takes a back seat. There are many incredible tech tools that enhance learning. That's why it's essential to teach students to use technology, including AI, thoughtfully and effectively. Preparing students for the future means incorporating technology into the school day, while making sure they are continuing to communicate, be creative and problem solve on their own.

"The world has changed a lot since our first school began in 1836, but some of the fundamentals of a great education have stayed the same," says Dr. Amy Zaher, superintendent. "That's why we believe having a balanced approach to education is the key to building strong students, strong schools and, ultimately, a stronger community."



*These Swartz and Albright students agree that recess is an essential part of the school day.*



## BIG REVEAL: NEW GYM, UPGRADES TO CLASSROOMS AND COMMON AREAS

When students arrived for the first day of school this year, they found upgrades in classrooms and common areas districtwide, as well as the long-awaited new gym and locker rooms at Albright.

“All of the construction was completed on budget and in time for the first day of school,” says Dr. Amy Zaher, superintendent. “We have improved our aging infrastructure and enhanced the learning environments.”

The Albright gym was the final phase one project of Safe Schools | Secure Futures. The old gym was torn down in June 2025, and construction on the new gym was finished this summer, as crews worked on the roof and installed flooring, bleachers and other interior final touches. The new gym improves safety and supervision and provides more usable space and event seating. Public toilets also were added so visitors do not need to access the academic area of the building.

The classroom and common area work was part of phase two plans to improve and update instructional spaces. This included:

- New flooring, counters, lighting, paint and other interior work in all three schools
- A resurfaced Swartz playground that maximizes safety and accessibility
- Gym improvements at Swartz and Salt Creek
- A library renovation at Salt Creek



*Families enjoyed the renovated Salt Creek library together during the Community Showcase held at the school in September.*



*The new gym is a welcome addition to Albright, the District and the community. It provides enhanced athletic space and improved safety, security and supervision.*



The Safe Schools | Secure Futures referendum was passed in fall 2024 and enabled the District to address critical issues related to safety, security and accessibility, while enhancing spaces and the overall educational experience for students.

In September, the District held Community Showcases at each school, unveiling the enhancements with ribbon cutting ceremonies and building tours. Community members walked through the schools and took in the bright, modern learning environments.



## APPRECIATING COMMON BONDS AND DIFFERENCES

Salt Creek students recently came together to create family trees, with each leaf based on answers to fun questions. It was a creative way to learn about attributes they share, as well as the differences that make them unique.



## DISTRICT ROLLS OUT A 'SMALL-BUT-MIGHTY' ADMIN TEAM

District 48 has launched its new administrative structure, which is designed to better align the systems that support students and staff. Leadership functions have been streamlined to ensure stronger and more efficient coordination and communication.

This includes the creation of the assistant superintendent position, which was filled by Dr. Emily Burnett, formerly director of student services and human resources. In addition to her previous

areas of responsibility, she is now overseeing curriculum and instruction and providing other leadership assistance to the superintendent.

The District also has added a director of technology, Matt Ryan, to provide more consistent and proactive leadership and develop a long-term technology plan. The new role is not an additional expense, as funds from previous technology outsourcing are being used.

The cost-effective organizational

structure – with its “small-but-mighty” team – is designed to promote collaboration and position the District for long-term stability and growth, according to Burnett. “Our focus is on being accessible, working alongside teachers and staff and making sure they have the support and resources they need to help students. We have already heard they have noticed the change and are grateful for the hands-on support and involvement from our team.”

## NEW SCHOOL LEADERS HIT THE GROUND RUNNING

Steven Hanus became principal of Salt Creek Primary this school year, replacing Lauren Scanlan, who left the District for a new professional opportunity. Hanus, previously districtwide assistant principal, has been with D48 for 16 years, in roles ranging from teacher to coach to substitute assistant principal to principal.

Replacing Hanus as districtwide assistant principal is Ashley Luzietti. She joined D48 at the beginning of her 13th year in education, bringing experience in teaching, instructional coaching and leadership. The districtwide assistant principal position was created last year to better support students in the newly reconfigured grade levels.

## THREE YEARS OF GREAT STRIDES... CONGRATULATIONS, DR. ZAHER!

Dr. Amy Zaher is starting her fourth year as D48 superintendent. It has been an eventful tenure so far, with Zaher and her team making significant progress and transforming the District in many ways. Here are a few of the accomplishments and changes of the past few years:

- Passage of \$48M bond referendum that funded Safe Schools | Secure Futures initiative.
- Completion of capital projects to improve aging infrastructure and address safety, security, accessibility and learning needs.
- Shift in grade-level configurations to better align with student development and state standards.
- Steady growth and achievement in ELA and math and Albright going from Academic Watchlist to Exemplary.
- Adoption of new ELA and math curriculum.
- Development of new Strategic Plan, using input from stakeholders.
- A balanced budget, highest financial recognition from the state and fiscal responsibility while accomplishing long-awaited projects.
- Rollout of parent engagement events.
- An increase in the percentage of parents somewhat likely/extremely likely to recommend D48 (98%!), according to 5Essentials.

## SALT CREEK SUPERFANS ARE READY TO BEAR DOWN

*The Chicago Bears' youngest fans were full of team spirit as Salt Creek held Bears Day to kick off the exciting new season.*





1110 S. Villa Ave.  
Villa Park, IL 60181  
630-279-8400  
[www.saltcreek48.org](http://www.saltcreek48.org)

## SCHOOLS

Albright Middle School  
Grades 6-8  
Mrs. Heidi Hummel  
*Principal*

Stella May Swartz School  
Grades 3-5  
Dr. Karen Marino  
*Principal*

Salt Creek Primary School  
Pre-K-Grade 2  
Mr. Steven Hanus  
*Principal*  
Ms. Ashley Luzietti  
*Districtwide Asst. Principal*

# NEW YEAR, REFRESHED SPACES

As the 2026-2027 school year got underway, Albright students were eager to reunite with their friends and teachers and ready to get back to work. They were also happy to discover the results of work completed over the summer – upgrades in their classrooms and throughout the school, plus a new gym. The gym had been under construction for over a year and was unveiled to students on the first day, receiving rave reviews. There were also improvement projects in the other schools. Learn more inside.



## IN THIS ISSUE

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- ✓ **Balancing Technology and the Basics:** The world has changed a lot, but D48's focus on the fundamentals has remained strong.
- ✓ **A Transformative Time:** A grateful school district congratulates Dr. Zaher for her first three years as superintendent.
- ✓ **And more!**

