

Superintendent's Weekly Newsletter



May 9, 2025

Dear Colleagues,

Like so many of our colleagues, I was deeply shocked and saddened to learn of the passing of Dr. José M. Torres, U-46 superintendent from 2008-2014. The Board of Education recognized him with a moment of silence at Monday's meeting, and I was honored to be able to publicly share the impact he had on my career.

As a leader, mentor, and education advocate, Dr. Torres embodied the values of equity, service, and humanity. I had the profound honor of being hired by Dr. Torres as the Principal of Bartlett High School and later as the Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning. His belief in people—and his insistence that we lead with purpose—shaped the trajectory of my career and life and the lives of countless others, including thousands of students. Our students in U-46 who will never know this amazing man, benefit every day from this very insistence.

Dr. Torres championed programs that reflected his unwavering commitment to inclusivity and educational excellence. Our award-winning Dual Language program was launched under his leadership; it now serves more than 12,000 students in preschool through 12th grade. He established the Superintendent's Scholarship for first-generation college students, supported the creation of leadership institutes for Hispanic and African-American parents, and invested in early childhood education and programs for students with special needs. Above all, he reminded us and required that we must truly know our students—not just their academic data, but their stories, their struggles and their dreams.

He led with heart and intellect. His legacy lives on in every classroom where a child feels seen, in every family that finds a voice, and in every leader who dares to imagine a more just and compassionate world.

I will always be grateful for Dr. Torres' vision, his courage, and his wisdom. He made us all better.

If interested and able, the family encourages donations to one of the following organizations:

- The [Southern Poverty Law Center](#)—an organization aligned with Dr. Torres and his lifelong pursuit of justice and equity.
- The family also encourages donations to the [U-46 Educational Foundation's Superintendent's Scholarship](#).

May his memory be an inspiration as we strive to make each day a great day to learn in U-46.

Dr. Suzanne Johnson

Kudos

Note: We enjoy seeing the recognition and respect among our U-46 Team through the [Kudos submitted](#) in each issue of the Superintendent's Weekly. In an effort to further recognize our team members, we will be sharing select Kudos on social media each week under the hashtag #U46StaffKudos. When entering Kudos in Let's Talk, please note if you would prefer to not have your kudos shared on social media. We look forward to continuing to receive your kudos and celebrating them in this new way.

Remember, only Kudos with the sender's name will appear in the Weekly; no anonymous messages. Kudos are due by **5 p.m. each Tuesday**.

Kudos to the Mentors and Mentees Participating in the U-46 Teacher Mentor Program, from Veronica Kernler and Gloria Helin, Teacher Leaders for the Teacher Mentor Program

We are deeply grateful to the over 700 incredible mentors and mentees of the U-46 Teacher Mentor Program. Your collaboration, hard work, and unwavering support lift our entire community. Thank you for inspiring growth, sharing your expertise, and making a lasting impact every day!

#TeacherAppreciationWeek #U46 Proud #MentorshipMatters



Kudos to the Ontarioville Teachers and Staff, from Mrs. Spencer, Dr. Ma and Mr. Bacheller, all at Ontarioville Elementary School

Kudos to our incredible teaching staff at Ontarioville. We want to take a moment to express our deepest gratitude for the passion, patience, and dedication you bring into our classrooms every single day. Your tireless efforts—to ignite curiosity, foster critical thinking, and nurture each student’s unique talents—do not go unnoticed. You are the architects of our future, and we recognize your profound impact on every life you touch. Your work is the foundation upon which students build confidence, explore new ideas, and embrace challenges. Whether you’re delivering a lesson on fractions, guiding a debate on world events, or simply offering a listening ear, you are shaping individuals who will contribute positively to our community and beyond. We appreciate you and all you do!

Kudos to Kim Fresseman, at Abbott Middle School, from Student Joshua Jungo and his Mom, Natalie Jungo

We appreciate your dedication, Ms. Fresseman. Abbott Middle School is truly fortunate to have a team member like yourself, who consistently demonstrates outstanding qualities, communicates effectively, and engages positively, always exceeding expectations in every aspect. We are all grateful for your commitment. Thank you,

Felicitaciones a Liliana Femat, de Kamila Cahuantzi Michua, estudiante de U-46

Muchas gracias por estar siempre ahí, apoyándome y alegrándome el día. Me ha enseñado muchas cosas en estos dos años y siempre lo recordaré. La quiero mucho, maestra Femat, con todo mi respeto.

(Translation)

Kudos to Liliana Femat, at Tefft Middle School, from Kamila Cahuantzi Michua, U-46 Student

Thank you very much for always being there, supporting me and brightening my day. You have taught me many things these two years, and I will always remember that. I love you very much teacher Femat, with all respect.

Kudos to Cristina Cabrera, at Elgin High School, from Dr. Jeremy Burnham and the Entire Elgin High School Academy and School Community

We extend our heartfelt congratulations to IB Coordinator Cristina Cabrera for her decades-long dedication to Elgin High School and the International Baccalaureate (IB) Program.

On Wednesday, April 30, 2025, Elgin High School administered its first-ever IB exams—a historic milestone for our school and community. This moment would not have been possible without Ms. Cabrera's tireless leadership, unwavering commitment, and belief in the promise of the IB Program at EHS. Thank you, Ms. Cabrera, from all of us—staff and students alike—for helping turn this vision into reality.

Kudos to Tefft Middle School Custodial Team Ron Rabe and Guillermo "Filipe" Temixqueno, the Plant Operations flooring crew - Brett Roberts and Matt Kovacs, and our Level 1 IS Tech, Diego Mendez Puente, from Patricia Weithofer, and the Students and Teachers of the Tefft Middle School Computer Lab

We wanted to thank these individuals for their hard work and commitment to our building. The team saw a brief window opportunity to get the 30-year-old wearing carpet replaced with tile in the TMS Computer Lab before the school year ended. They were rock stars in completing the work in only six days. The team worked hard to ensure seamless move in and out, and they ensured we had space and learning tools available for all while we were displaced for a week. Great job guys, we appreciate you. The room is gleaming with the new floors. So many have popped in to see how great it looks.

Kudos to Mary Jean Berry in Procurement, from Jessica Alek in Health Services

Huge kudos to Mary Jean in Procurement! MJ has been a lifesaver; she has helped walk me through and problem solve some strange and perplexing problems, even the dumb ones! Whenever I email or call, MJ has always been more than kind and happy to help me troubleshoot and fix problems! Thank you MJ for all your help! You are so very appreciated!

Kudos to Chris Mains and the Whole Maintenance Team at Larkin High School, from Jessica Alek and the Health Services Team

Thank you Chris and team for always helping us with every little or big problem we encounter. Your help has been amazing through our move in, then moving around to moving again. Your willingness to help us whenever we have a problem has made a world of difference! Chris and his team are amazing no matter the challenge they're always happy to help out and never seem annoyed even if it is the same thing breaking day after day. All of you are eager to always save the day. Thank you all so much. We appreciate you all!

Kudos to Brian Kenny and Cory Deskinsin, in Plant Operations, from Jessica Alek in Health Services

Thank You Brian and Cory, you guys are always willing to help fix our problems and even help with the little ones. You both are always so friendly and smiling even when the job is difficult. You both are appreciated for all the help you give us here at the AUX building! Thank you!

Kudos to Rosa Irizarry, from David Dybalski, both at Elgin High School

Thank you to Rosie for her help getting the supplies ready for my two group visits from Ellis and Larsen middle schools. Your assistance and willingness to help was invaluable. Thank you and I enjoy working with you.

Kudos to Mrs. Caroline Hix, Ms. Gabriella Arnieri, and Mrs. Abigale King, from Samira Sanchez, all at Heritage Elementary School

I am a sixth grade teacher at Heritage and I want to send kudos to the fourth grade teachers for the incredible Market/Mercado they established with their classes tying in into their economics unit. This event was fun, engaging, and educational. Students had the opportunity to learn valuable lessons about managing their Eagle Tickets. Our school currency is based on positive behavior and gained insight into the hard work and creativity involved in starting their own businesses. Thank you, fourth grade team, for providing such a meaningful and memorable experience for our students!



Kudos to Jaimie Abney-Giraldo and Zach Geller, both in the Fine Arts Department, from Carolyn Dobrinich Levy, at Century Oaks Elementary School

I would like to thank Jaimie and Zach for all their help in my classroom. When I found out I would be losing half of my teaching space next year due to building renovations, I knew I needed help as I am 8 months pregnant. They immediately put me on their schedule and came over not once, but twice, to help me get rid of, sort, and condense everything - not an easy task with all of the instruments. They then rearranged every piece of furniture and moved the instruments for me. I am incredibly grateful and could not have done this without you two!

Kudos to the Ontarioville Nurses - Elaine Trella, Lorraine Conejo, and Jesseka Retherford, from Mrs. Spencer, Dr. Ma and Mr. Bacheller, all at Ontarioville Elementary School

During Nurse Appreciation Week, we want to extend our heartfelt thanks for the care and compassion you bring to our school every day. Your gentle reassurance, expert guidance, and quick response to every scrape, sniffle, and emergency make our students—and staff—feel safe and supported. We're grateful for the warmth and professionalism you bring to your role, and for all the ways you help our school community stay healthy and happy. Thank you for everything you do. Your kindness and expertise are deeply appreciated today and every day.

Kudos to the Liberty Elementary School Teachers and Staff, from Stephanie Sylvester, at Liberty Elementary School

This week, we celebrate our amazing Liberty teachers and staff! Thank you for your dedication, passion, and tireless work to support our students every day. You are truly appreciated – not just this week, but all year long. Thank you for all that you do!

Kudos to Brenda Prado, in Professional Learning, from Melanie Patterson, in Specialized Student Services

Thank you to Brenda for all of your hard work and dedication to the May 2025 Instructional Conference. Brenda worked long hours and committed a great deal of time to ensure that our courses were properly placed in Canvas. Your efforts are truly appreciated!

Kudos to the Washington Elementary School Team, from the Fausto Family

I wanted to take a moment to express our sincere appreciation to the entire team at Washington Elementary for everything you do for my son and all the students you serve. From the dedicated teachers in the classroom to the kind and helpful office staff, your impact is truly felt and deeply valued. Your dedication, care, and positive energy make the school a place he looks forward to every single day. That peace of mind is priceless for a parent, and I am beyond grateful.

Kudos to the Ontarioville Paraeducators and Interventionists - Lissette Vega, Ida M. Garcia, Dipti Lagdiwala, Taiz Sanchez, Dena Walters, Laurie Summers, Susan LaRusso, and Dianne Netko, from Mrs. Spencer, Dr. Ma and Mr. Bacheller, all at Ontarioville Elementary School

We want to recognize the incredible support you provide each day and how deeply we appreciate your dedication and expertise. Your patience, adaptability, and genuine care help create an inclusive and nurturing environment where every student can thrive. Whether you're leading small-group lessons, assisting with classroom management, or offering one-on-one encouragement, your contributions make a profound difference. Your unwavering commitment ensures that all students feel empowered, confident, and supported. Thank you for the compassion and professionalism you bring to our school community. We are truly grateful for everything you do!

Kudos to Melanie Patterson, in Specialized Student Services, from Lisa Jackson, in Equity and Inclusion

Kudos to Melanie Patterson for the outstanding job she did organizing the first annual I am LEAD Gala for our young ladies! Her thoughtful planning, attention to detail, and commitment to excellence made the event truly special. Thanks to her efforts, the girls had a memorable evening filled with recognition, heartfelt reflections on their time in I am LEAD, and meaningful fellowship. Melanie poured her heart into this project, and it showed in every aspect of the celebration. Thank you for creating such a powerful and uplifting experience.

Kudos to Ericka Brown, Scharone Lewis, Tiffany Mikhail Wright, Paola Miranda-Jimenez, Katrina Neal, Jennifer Swan, Linda Taylor and Heritage Parent Ms. Kaminski, from Lisa Jackson, in Equity and Inclusion

Each of you made invaluable and distinct contributions to the success of our inaugural I am LEAD Gala. Your dedication and thoughtful efforts played a vital role in ensuring that our young ladies experienced an exceptional event; one that honored their worth and celebrated their unique journeys. I am deeply grateful for your support.

Kudos to Plant Operations Maintenance Department, from Beth Lucarelli, Head Custodian at Eastview Middle School

I would like to thank each member of Plant Operations' Maintenance department, including supervisors and coordinators. Maintenance has made a huge impact at Eastview this year through repairing roof leaks, painting outside, installing new bottle filler fountains, troubleshooting electrical and lighting issues, and everything in between. A special shout out to our HVAC and pump/motor team, lead HVAC technician Mark Anderson; HVAC technicians Sean Bowers and John Weber; and pump/motor technician Jeremy Bilger! Thank you to this dedicated team for ensuring our equipment is running efficiently, provides fresh air, and comfortable temperatures for our students and staff. All of the maintenance crew's efforts this year have not gone unnoticed. We are truly grateful. It's a great day to be a Wolf!

Kudos to Mrs. Janie McCutchen, at Larsen Middle School, from Lisa Jackson, in Equity and Inclusion

Thank you for graciously accepting her well-deserved award for service at the I am LEAD Gala. As a co-founder and visionary, she has played an instrumental role in shaping the program and continues to serve with unyielding dedication. I am deeply grateful for her guidance, wisdom, encouragement, and enduring belief in the potential of our young ladies. Mrs. McCutchen exemplifies selflessness and generosity, and she remains a true role model for us all.

Kudos to the Ontarioville Secretaries - Gilda Estevez, Jose Perez, and Brenda Quintanilla, from Mrs. Spencer, Dr. Ma and Mr. Bacheller, all at Ontarioville Elementary School

Thank you for being the welcoming heart and organized backbone of our school every single day. Your friendly greetings, calm problem-solving, and attention to detail keep our office running smoothly and make everyone—students, staff, and visitors—feel right at home. From managing schedules and answering questions to handling emergencies with grace, your efficiency and warmth ensure that our community thrives. We're truly grateful for your dedication, professionalism, and the positive spirit you bring to our school.

Kudos to the Ontarioville Food Service and Noon Hour Staff - Ana Palencia, Marcela Garcia, Silvia Moncada, Pureza Lemus, Yvette Aguilar, Angeles Villafuerte, Diana Patino Juarez, Norma Gomez, Maria Velazquez, and Maia Arreola, from Mrs. Spencer, Dr. Ma, and Mr. Bacheller, all at Ontarioville Elementary School

Thank you for keeping our students safe, happy, and active each day. Your attentive presence on the playground and in the cafeteria transforms midday into a time of joy and camaraderie. Whether you're resolving a tumble on the playground, guiding a friendly game of soccer, or simply offering a smile and encouragement, your dedication ensures every child feels included and cared for. We appreciate the energy, patience, and positivity you bring to our school community. Your work doesn't go unnoticed, and we're grateful for the kindness and professionalism you demonstrate with every lunch tray and recess whistle.

Kudos to Kathryn Tornero from Stephanie Sylvester and Summer Schmidt, all at Liberty Elementary School

Katie went above and beyond in planning the Liberty Elementary trip to the Kane County Cougars game, a special event that takes place every two years for our second through sixth grade students. She thoughtfully coordinated every detail, from bussing and lunches to seating arrangements, ensuring everything went off without a hitch. Thank you, Katie, for your hard work, dedication, and for creating such a smooth and memorable experience for our Liberty students. We appreciate you!!



School District U-46

