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VOICE OF THE TOWN

MAY 6-12, 2010 | SPONSORED BY THE *Chicago Tribune*

School districts cut staff, summer school

By Sue Ter Maat
TRIBLOCAL.COM REPORTER

Mundelein school districts this year face major budget issues as one laid off teachers while the other cut summer school programs.

At Mundelein School District 75, more than 27 teachers and 13 support staff will not be returning next school year after the district decided to trim about \$750,000 from its budget.

Another 10 teachers will be moved from full-time to part-time status, district officials said.

District 75 Superintendent Cynthia Heidorn said the teacher and support staff cuts means class sizes will increase by about two students per class.

Next school year the average kindergarten class will have 23 children, first grade will have 22 children per class and grades second through fifth will have between 22 and 25 students.

At the district's middle school, core classes will be about 23 students and art and physical education courses will be between 28 and 29 students.

"It's higher, but still reasonable," Heidorn said of the class sizes.

Much of the budget crunch has been caused by lower than expected property values that affect property taxes, which the

districts receive.

Heidorn said District 75 previously received between \$3 million and \$5 million a few years ago, but now it's receiving between \$500,000 and \$600,000.

State payments to the district have not been forthcoming as education funding cuts is being negotiated in Springfield, Heidorn said. If the trend continues, District 75 is expected to be about \$1.5 million in debt by July 1, 2011, she said.

District 75 is planning a series of public workshops about the district's ongoing financial situation.

The district will discuss options including raising taxes, school closures or going to a four-day school week, Heidorn said. The workshops will be held at 7 p.m. May 12 and May 27 at Carl Sandburg Middle School, 855 W. Hawley St., in Mundelein.

While Diamond Lake School District 76 will not lay off staff, it has cut summer school remedial and enrichment programs.

"Fortunately, we didn't have to cut any programs from the regular school year," said District 76 Board President Keith Loeffler.

At District 76, the district slashed the budget by about \$400,000, cutting some summer school programs, Loeffler said.

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Little Wars break out in Lincolnshire



Steven Fratt, professor of history at Deerfield's Trinity College, uses cotton balls to indicate that a German tank has taken damage during the Little Wars convention held April 23-25 in Lincolnshire. For the story, see Page 23.

Triblocal.com photo by Patrick Rollens

Locals talk about what's happening via Twitter

By Heather Leszczewicz
TRIBLOCAL.COM REPORTER

Twitter used to pose the question "What are you doing?" to its users. Now, the social networking Web site is asking "What's happening?"

Locally, businesses, organizations and individuals are answering that question by

using Twitter and other forms of social media to network, talk about the news in their communities and share their own thoughts and opinions.

Twitter is a micro-blogging Web site and application that allows users to type out messages limited to a total of 140 charac-

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NEWS

Twitter

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ters. Facebook, on the other hand, allows users to share photo galleries, play games and connect with friends.

Libertyville resident Jessica Longly has two Twitter accounts. She runs @CDW_Jessica for her day job with technology company CDW and @GLMV_Relay4Life for the American Cancer Society's Green Oaks, Libertyville, Mundelein and Vernon Hills 2010 Relay for Life.

"I see Twitter as a real time means of communication. I'm on it literally all the time," Longly said. "Twitter has changed the way companies have to communicate with customers."

Stevenson High School Director of Public Information James Conrey, who tweets for @stevensonhs, agrees.

"It's becoming more and more a part of society," Conrey said. "It's a communication tool. It'd be kind of silly not to use it. It's one more tool at our disposal, another way to spread news."

The Lake County Forest Preserves has been using Twitter to spread its news since 2008.

"We launched into both Twitter and Facebook as part of our public information campaign," LCFPD communications specialist Catherine Savage said.

The district had a referendum issue on the ballot and, Savage said, the electorate was skewing young.

"We wanted the electorate to know about the issue and decided social media would be a good vehicle for that," she said.

The forest preserves' main account, @LCFPD, was launched in 2008. The following year, an account for the Lake County Discovery Museum, @LakeCoMuseum, was created.

Three more accounts were recently launched for the district's golf courses.

"It's been a fun channel for us," Savage said. "It gives us an outlet for all the little stories in the forest preserves that we didn't have before."

Local libraries have also been tweeting up a storm — whether it's for the Save Libraries campaign or to reach out to residents.

"We thought it was a good idea to get on Twitter and connect with patrons in a different way," said Carrie Straka, a Vernon Area Public Library District adult services

librarian. "I use it as a way to publicize the different events going on. It's a way to get our name out there."

The library can be found on Twitter @VernonAreaPL.

While sharing information is part of Twitter users' goals, interaction is also advised.

"You have to participate," Longly said. "Usually, you get what you put into it. It's like you're marketing yourself, branding yourself."

Conrey said he's finding that Stevenson has more of a following on Facebook versus Twitter, which could be related to a lack of interaction.

"We haven't gotten into the whole two-way street, which would account to some of disparity," he said.

Conrey said Stevenson isn't seeking feedback but views social media as one more way to get information out there.

"We're trying to figure out how to best use it and what value they have in communication," he said. "Twitter could be helpful in an emergency."

Savage said she's looking to Twitter as a good resource for last-minute messaging as well.

But the impact social media is having is still to be seen.

"We're feeling our way through this — Facebook and Twitter as ways to transmit information," Conrey said.

Since the forest preserves launched their Twitter accounts, Savage said they've been growing ever since. She said they've estimated that they've sent out more than half a million messages, taking into account their tweets along with how many times their followers retweet a message.

"[The library's] not sure if it's helping yet, we don't have a huge follower list," Straka said. "I definitely think once we continue to grow our followers, it will help down the road."

But, Longly said, she sees the value Twitter adds to communication currently.

"People want to be heard, and Twitter lets peoples' voices be heard," she said.

—*Find Libertyville, Mundelein, Vernon Hills, Lincolnshire and Lake Zurich TribLocal community manager Heather Leszczewicz on Twitter at @hlesztriblocal.*