

ADDISON TRAIL

STAFF

RECOGNITION

DINNER

DUPAGE HIGH SCHOOL

DISTRICT 88

*Building Futures*

2025

MAY 2, 2025

ALLEGRA BANQUETS OF VILLA PARK,  
237 W. ST. CHARLES ROAD, VILLA PARK

WILLOWBROOK

# PROGRAM

## Welcome

*Donna Craft Cain,  
District 88 Board of  
Education President*

## Dinner

## Service Recognition Awards

## Outstanding Achievement Awards

## Presentation of Retirees

## Closing Remarks

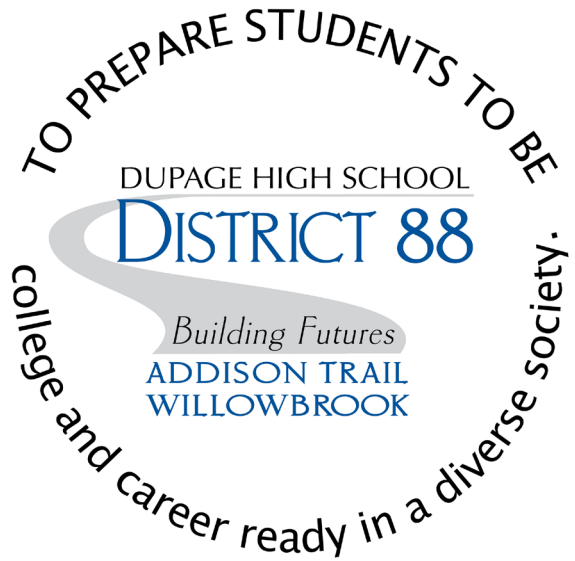
*Dr. Jean Barbanente,  
District 88  
Superintendent*

## DISTRICT 88 BOARD OF EDUCATION

Donna Craft Cain  
Amy Finnegan  
Gail Galivan  
Dan Olson  
Christine Poirier  
Diana Stout  
Jean Taylor

# COVER DESIGNED BY

Addison Trail junior  
Esmeralda Marquez



# Service Recognition Awards

## ADDISON TRAIL

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Jack Andrews  
Veronica Banuelos  
Rebecca Boisse  
Karen Martinez  
Robert Portillo  
Nilay Woodbury  
Dena Zarou

## DISTRICT OFFICE

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*10 years*  
Michael Carlson  
Stephanie Nitka

## WILLOWBROOK

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Ambar Aguirre  
Issa Daou  
Edgar Dorado  
Kelly Harrington  
Curtis Hudson  
Juveria Mir  
Richard Ortiz  
Kevin Quinn  
Trudy Sulita  
Azahara Tello  
Andrew Wilhoit  
Nilay Woodbury

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Felix Barahona Diaz  
Jeannette Becerra  
Thomas Hayden  
Sonia Hernandez  
Melissa Morales  
Nicholas Pingel  
David Whitaker

*15 years*

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John Bondi  
Steve Decker  
Barbara Meredith  
Bartolomeo Missanelli  
Curtis Tate  
Kelvin Taylor  
Neil Wahlgren

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Itzel Carranza Hegner  
John Fouser  
Christopher Grice  
Justin Hegner  
Anna McSweeney  
Alison Nix  
Annette Severino  
Michael Valeski

*20 years*

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Stephanie Ennis  
Brian Eslick  
Daniel Fliegel  
Jamie Gourley  
Kimberly Mikesell  
Courtney Vala  
Joshua Zwart

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David Bendfeldt  
Thomas Bendicsen  
Shannon Giertz  
Julie Johnson  
Joseph Mahoney  
Theresa Marzullo  
Donald Miller  
Paul Parpet  
Patricia Subers

*25 years*

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Daniel Bannon  
Patrick Sikorski  
Darryl Thompson  
Victor Wisner  
Matthew Zaucha

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Thomas Hubner  
Janine Nacht  
Maria Ramon

*30 years*

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Steven Chojnacki

# 2024-25 Outstanding Achievement Awards

## ROB SCHADER IS BEING RECOGNIZED FOR:

*"His unwavering commitment to all things Addison Trail."*

*"His dedication and willingness to help out for any event."*

*"His overall positive attitude, even though he seems to always been planning, managing, or preparing for the next event. The guy is always super chill and seems to really enjoy the work that he does."*

## LUCY ALMANZA-FERNANDEZ IS BEING RECOGNIZED FOR:

*"She gives selflessly, dedicating her time and energy to creating unique learning experiences inside and outside the classroom. Through her unwavering commitment to inclusivity, she fosters an environment that unites all students, impacting their education and school community."*



# 2024-25 Outstanding Achievement Awards

## **Robert “Rob” Schader,** *Addison Trail*

Robert “Rob” Schader joined District 88 in 2006, bringing with him five years of teaching experience from McHenry High School and St. Patrick’s. For the past 15 years, he has served as the Physical Education, Health and Driver Education Department Head, where he has been instrumental in transforming the department. Under his leadership, the program has expanded to include several innovative courses, including Sports Officiating dual-credit classes and Online PE.

Throughout his tenure, Rob has worn many hats, serving as Head Girls Basketball Coach, Head Girls Bowling Coach, National Honor Society Dean, Co-Curricular Coordinator, Assistant Athletic Director, Driver Education Coordinator and member of the Building Leadership Team. He briefly coached football and

stepped in as a long-term substitute Assistant Principal.

Rob takes particular pride in his collaborative work with NHS, Key Club and Student Council, organizing impactful service events such as “Paws for a Cause” and biannual Days of Service that engage about 150 students in community improvement activities, from campus cleanups to food pantry collections.

He considers his time coaching basketball as one of the most rewarding experiences of his career.



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## **Lucy Almanza-Fernandez,** *Willowbrook*

Lucy Almanza-Fernandez has been fulfilling her childhood dream of teaching for 16 years. After earning her bachelor’s degree from Lewis University and a master’s degree from National Louis University, she taught for five years at Morton and four years at Oswego East before joining District 88 in 2009.

Having been an English Learner herself in elementary school, Lucy brings a unique perspective and deep understanding to her role as an EL teacher. She personally understands the challenges of learning English while navigating the American public school system, making her an exceptional advocate and mentor for her students.

Six years ago, Lucy founded the Ritmo Latino Club, which has since grown to include more than 50 students. The club

provides a vital space for students to connect with the school community, while embracing their cultural heritage. Her vision has expanded to include Cultural Night celebrations that feature diverse foods, traditions and a global mapping activity where students can identify their family origins.

Through her dedicated efforts, Lucy continues to raise awareness of different languages and cultures, helping all students feel valued and represented in the school community.



# 2024-25 Retirees

## **Laura DiNatalie, Addison Trail**

Laura DiNatalie joined District 88 in 2008, where she has proudly served as the Bookstore Manager for her entire tenure. Laura's workspace became her "own little world," a place where she thrived on constant movement and interaction rather than being confined to a desk.

What Laura cherished most about her position was working directly with students. She delighted in making them laugh and building meaningful connections that extended beyond transactions. The relationships formed with students and staff through the years have created her most treasured memories at District 88.

Before joining the district, Laura worked at District 4 and spent time at home raising her triplets. As a single mother, working in a school environment was a deliberate choice that allowed her to maintain a schedule aligned with her children's needs.

During her years of service, Laura has witnessed significant positive changes in the district's systems, particularly in registration and payment methods.

Her legacy at District 88 will be remembered through the countless lives she touched with her warm personality and dedication to service.

To new employees, Laura offers this wisdom: "Be patient. Learn the systems. Be very organized."

Upon retirement, Laura looks forward to spending quality time with her three grandchildren: Mena, Arenó and Bennett. Her plans include enjoying numerous vacations and giving back through volunteer work at a hospital, where she hopes to comfort newborns who are born with addiction or without family support, as well as a pet shelter.



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## **Tim Homan, Addison Trail**

Tim Homan joined District 88 in September 2008 as a Teacher Aide in Special Education at Addison Trail. After seven dedicated years in this role, he transitioned to a custodial position in December 2015, where he has diligently worked the third shift until his retirement.

Tim's path to education came following a layoff from the University of Illinois Chicago, where he had served for nearly five years as a Supervisor in Meetings, Conferences and Guest Services. This career change aligned with his consideration of pursuing a master's degree in Special Education. His academic foundation includes a bachelor's degree in Engineering Design and Drafting from Northern Illinois University.

What Tim cherished most about his time at District 88 was working with students, particularly as a Teacher Aide. "I loved being a mentor to them," he reflects. "I especially liked working with student-athletes to encourage them to be successful in all aspects of life." This commitment to student success extended beyond his formal duties, culminating in being named an honorary coach for the boys basketball team, which he describes as "a

great honor Coach Lyons provided me."

Throughout his 17-year tenure, Tim formed meaningful relationships with colleagues across departments. "I loved working with many of the special education teachers. I also worked with

many CTE teachers, and those memories are what I will take away with me," he shares. "The people I worked with were great friends, and the relationships I built were meaningful."

Tim's retirement plans include relocating to The Villages in Florida with his wife, Donna, and their dog, Emmie. His family legacy in education continues through two of his three children – Michael, Kevin and Hanna – following in his footsteps by becoming teachers.



## James “Jim” Perusich, *Addison Trail*

James “Jim” Perusich joined District 88 in 1997 as a member of the English Department at Addison Trail High School, arriving with three years of prior teaching experience at Benito Juarez in Chicago. During his remarkable 28-year tenure with the district, James has taught Sophomore Honors English, AP Literature and Dual-Credit Composition, enriching the academic experiences of countless students.

Beyond the classroom, James has been the dedicated Student Council sponsor for 25 years, guiding student leaders and fostering school spirit and community involvement.

When reflecting on his favorite aspects of teaching, James highlights “interacting with the energy of the kids, their sense of humor and the appreciation they show.” His decision to become an educator stemmed from a complex relationship with his own educational experience: “I always loved learning, but did not like high school. It felt like an opportunity to impact students who are apathetic to learning in high school.”

James has been driven by “the importance of them getting out of adolescence with self-confidence and not self-doubt.”

James built a strong academic foundation with a bachelor’s degree in English from Loyola University Chicago, followed by two master’s

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degrees – one in Secondary English Language Arts from Northeastern Illinois University and another in Composition and Rhetoric from Eastern Illinois University.

What James will miss most in retirement are “the kids and the interactions we have on a daily basis, whether it is in the classroom or in Student Council.” He particularly values seeing “the students at the beginning of the year unsure and not liking the class to the end of the year, (when) they love it and have done well.”

His advice to new employees is simple yet profound: “Trust yourself. The most important part is your intuition.”

Looking ahead to retirement, James plans to possibly pursue another master’s degree and continue teaching in some format. Most importantly, he looks forward to spending more time with his children, Celestine and Christian.

## Vicki Ream, *Addison Trail*

Vicki Ream’s dedicated service to District 88 spans back to 1993, when she first began working with the EDSED cooperative off-campus program. In 2003, she transitioned to the district’s newly established SED 88 program, where she served for a decade before moving to the Bridges self-contained classrooms in 2013, a position she has held until her retirement.

Throughout her 31-year career in special education, Vicki has maintained an unwavering commitment to her students. When asked about her favorite aspect of her job, she didn’t hesitate to identify “the kids in the SED 88 program” as the most rewarding part of her position.

Vicki’s path to education took an interesting turn from her original career aspirations. She initially wanted to work in prisons in a therapeutic capacity, but when faced with limited job opportunities and no prisons in the area, she made the pivotal decision to channel her passion for helping others into education instead. This decision ultimately shaped her remarkable three-decade career dedicated to supporting students with special needs.

Her education background includes degrees from Eastern Illinois University and Northern

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Illinois University, complemented by graduate programs at National Louis University, providing her with the strong foundation needed to excel in her specialized field.

As Vicki embarks on her retirement journey, she looks forward to traveling, with plans already in place for a trip to Greece in September. This new chapter will allow her to explore new horizons, while carrying with her the profound impact she has had on countless students throughout her years of service.

The District 88 community extends its deepest gratitude to Vicki Ream for her exceptional dedication to special education and the lasting difference she has made in the lives of her students and colleagues.

## Charlene “Char” Restivo, *Addison Trail*

Charlene “Char” Restivo began her journey with District 88 in 1999 as a Teacher Aide in Special Education at Addison Trail High School. Hired by Mr. Mortier to work with Char Cliff, she was memorably warned, “Before you quit, come to me first, as Char Cliff has had a history of aides quitting.” That warning proved unnecessary, as Char remained dedicated to the same position throughout her 26-year career.

As a graduate of Northern Illinois University with a degree in Sociology and a minor in Psychology, Char originally aspired to become a marriage counselor. Before joining District 88, she worked at Rosary College and Wesley School as a lunch coordinator. When she saw an advertisement for a Teaching Assistant position at AT while her daughter was a senior there, she applied.

What Char found most fulfilling about her work was making breakthroughs with students in both Special Education and the Reading Department. “Many cannot read, and we are so protective and supportive. When they experience that breakthrough in reading, it’s incredibly fulfilling,” she shares. One of her most cherished memories involves a student

from her first five years, who later sent family members on two different occasions to thank her for teaching him to read.

Char’s three children – Stephanie, Corinne and Russell – are all Addison Trail graduates.

Today, she enjoys being grandmother to four granddaughters: Vivian, Eliana, Johanna and Edie.

In retirement, Char looks forward to traveling with her husband, Brett, with plans to visit Greece in September with friends who are natives. She also hopes to see Mount Rushmore and the Grand Canyon, while spending two days each week in the summer with her grandchildren.

Her advice to new employees: “Have a lot of patience. Kids are coming to you with fewer skills, and it’s our job to provide them with background knowledge and support.”



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## Matt Thompson, *Addison Trail*

Matt Thompson’s distinguished career at District 88 spans more than three decades, beginning in 1992, when he joined as a coach. His dedication to education led him to become a Teacher Aide in 1995, transitioning to Business Teacher in 1997. Matt’s leadership abilities were quickly recognized, leading to his appointment as Dean of Students in 1998 and Director of Deans in 1999. In 2004, he assumed the role of Athletic Director, a position he has held with distinction for the past 21 years.

Throughout his tenure, Matt has been deeply involved in athletics, serving as Head Basketball Coach from 1995-2004, while also coaching football, cross-country, and volleyball. His commitment to developing well-rounded student-athletes has been a hallmark of his career.

Matt’s journey to education began in corporate America, where he balanced his professional responsibilities with coaching. This experience eventually inspired him to pursue education full-time, prompting him to obtain teaching certification to fully immerse himself in the school environment. He earned his business degree from North Central College, teaching certification from Benedictine University, and later completed his master’s degree and

administration certification from National Louis University.

“As a head coach, I worked with student-athletes, but as a dean, I was able to impact students in different ways. As an administrator, I then had the opportunity to influence teachers and staff,” he shares.

He particularly values the relationships built with community members “who genuinely did it for the interest of kids,” noting how together they “built great programs for the kids of Addison.”

To new employees, Matt offers this wisdom: “Make sure to treat each year as the most important year, because for each class, it is their most important, so it makes every one of your years the most important.”

In retirement, Matt plans to return to his passion for coaching basketball, specifically working with youth at an academy.



## **Lisa Crotty, *District Office***

Lisa Crotty began her career with District 88 in February 2007, joining the Library Media Center at Addison Trail High School. Her journey within the district led her from the media center to the student accounting position at AT, before culminating in her role as Student Information Specialist for the district, where she skillfully collaborated with staff from both Addison Trail and Willowbrook high schools.

Lisa's connection to District 88 extends beyond her professional contributions, as she also is the proud parent of three Addison Trail graduates: James, Jeremy and Meghan. This dual perspective as both employee and parent has given her a unique appreciation for the district's impact on students and families.

Throughout her 18-year tenure, Lisa has been an integral part of the Addison Trail and District 88 community, known for her dedication and commitment to excellence in her various roles. Her work behind the scenes in student information systems has been vital

to the smooth operation of the district.

As Lisa transitions to retirement, she looks forward to spending as much time as possible with her children and grandchildren, while her husband, Jim,

continues his career. Though she's excited for this new chapter, Lisa will deeply miss the daily interactions and friendships formed during her time with the district - these relationships stand as the most cherished memories from her years of service.

The District 88 community extends heartfelt appreciation to Lisa Crotty for her years of dedicated service and wishes her joy and fulfillment in her well-deserved retirement.



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## **Teresa Kikos, *District Office***

Teresa Kikos joined District 88 in June 2016, bringing her talents to the District Office as the School Improvement Assistant. During her eight-year tenure, she expertly managed reports and accounting for numerous grants, including both annual allocations and competitive awards that spanned multiple years. Among her most significant contributions was her skillful management of the ESSER grant during the pandemic, helping to navigate the district through unprecedented challenges.

Teresa's path to District 88 included six years at Butler School District 53 and four years at Elmhurst School District 205, where she served as a lunch supervisor and playground monitor, after choosing to stay home with her children. What many colleagues might not know is Teresa's career background includes working as an operating room nurse before dedicating time to raising her family.

Her impressive credentials include a bachelor's degree in Nursing from the University of Illinois Chicago and a master's degree in Accounting from Dominican University - a diverse academic foundation

that prepared her well for the multifaceted responsibilities of her position.

Throughout her career, Teresa has demonstrated remarkable versatility, transitioning from health care to family care to education administration with grace and competence. Her attention to detail and financial acumen have been invaluable assets to District 88's operational success.

As Teresa embarks on retirement, she looks forward to embracing a new and precious role - helping to care for her daughter's first child, who will be Teresa's first grandchild. Beyond these family joys, she plans to relax and travel whenever possible with her husband, enjoying well-deserved leisure after years of dedicated service.



## Steve Chojnacki, Willowbrook

Steve Chojnacki began his journey with District 88 in 1995, launching a dedicated 29-year career teaching business education. Throughout his tenure, he has taught a variety of courses, including Consumer Management, Accounting 1 and 2, Speech, Tech and Financial Math, building a comprehensive business curriculum that has benefited countless students.

Beyond the classroom, Steve has been deeply involved in athletics and student activities. He has served as Assistant Track Coach for girls, Senior Class Adviser and Assistant and Head Coach for the boys and girls tennis programs, demonstrating his commitment to students' growth both academically and athletically.

What Steve has treasured most about his career is building relationships with students, many of whom he taught for three consecutive years. He particularly values the unique interactions each class brings, noting that "It is never the same thing over and over, even if teaching the same subject."

Steve's path to education was influenced by his wife, Stacy, who also is a teacher (at Lake Park High School) and is retiring this year as well. After earning his bachelor's degree in Finance from Lewis University and working

four years in the business world, Stacy convinced him to pursue teaching. He obtained his teaching certification from Chicago State University, bringing valuable real-world business experience to his instruction.

One aspect Steve will miss most is the interaction with students and families, some of which have spanned eight or more years.

In retirement, Steve plans to spend more time at his summer place in Minnesota, where he and his family have enjoyed vacationing for the past 27 years. He also intends to secure a part-time remote position in accounting or bookkeeping that will allow him flexibility in location.

Steve and Stacy are proud parents to three daughters: Alexis, Sara and Emma – one college graduate, one graduating this May and one sophomore at LSU.



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## Julio Del Real, Willowbrook

Julio Del Real joined District 88 in the 2007-08 school year as a Dean, bringing with him valuable experience as an Assistant Principal at West Chicago Middle School. His education career began in 1997-98 as a bilingual teacher at the middle school level, following his work as an Educational Opportunities Coordinator at West Chicago High School under a special grant program.

Throughout his 17-year tenure with District 88, Julio has served as both Dean and Director of Deans, making a significant impact on student support systems. His commitment extended well beyond administrative duties, as he coached girls soccer for an impressive 18 years, including eight years at the varsity level, and served as sophomore boys soccer coach for 12 years. Julio also was the dedicated leader and facilitator of Padres Unidos at Willowbrook for seven years, strengthening connections between the school and Latino families.

When asked about his favorite aspect of his job, Julio's answer came without hesitation: "The kids. Working with them – and the more challenges a student had, the better it was for me. I just love helping them get through their obstacles."

A graduate of Rockford College (1990), Julio

later earned his master's degree in Educational Leadership from Aurora University in 2005, building the foundation for his leadership roles in education.

To new educators, Julio offers this wisdom: "Never be afraid to show your students your passion for helping them. Be genuine."

Looking ahead to retirement, Julio plans to remain connected to education, while his wife completes her final year of teaching. He's considering substitute teaching or serving schools in another capacity. The couple also is exploring the possibility of spending the colder months in his wife's hometown in Mexico. Julio looks forward to spending more time with his sons, Julian and Edson, as well.

He adds a special note that he has loved working at District 88 and misses his friend Velma.



## Brian Eslick, Willowbrook

Brian Eslick joined Willowbrook High School in 2005 after making a significant career change that reflected his family values and passion for education. Prior to teaching, Brian spent 17 years in the private sector working for prestigious companies, including Andersen Consulting, Oracle and Bally Manufacturing.

While successful in the corporate world, Brian and his wife, Laura, found themselves asking, "What do we do with our kids in the summer?" This question led to a family decision that would change Brian's professional trajectory. While continuing his position at Oracle, he attended night school to earn his teaching credentials. His employer granted him a leave of absence to complete his student teaching, after which he taught for one year at Glenbard East before finding his home at District 88, where he has dedicated the past 19 years.

With a BA in Political Science from John Carroll University, an MBA from Loyola University Chicago and teaching credentials from National Louis University, Brian brought a wealth of knowledge and real-world experience to his classrooms. Throughout his tenure, he has taught a diverse array of courses, including AP Microeconomics and Macroeconomics, AP U.S. History, AP Human

Geography, ESL Economics and U.S. History. He also sponsored Civitas and the Economics Challenge for many years.

Brian particularly valued how "no two days are the same" in teaching. "The kids are all different and keep each day unique," he reflects. He found profound satisfaction in "working with students and seeing them grow from lost, insecure freshmen to incredibly impressive seniors."

In retirement, Brian plans to take the first year to discover what retirement life is like before deciding whether to return to work in some capacity. He and his wife, who retired two years ago, look forward to traveling domestically, with plans to drive east to Virginia and Washington, D.C., and fly west to explore Montana Wyoming, and New Mexico.



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## Mike Sullivan, Willowbrook

Mike Sullivan joined District 88 in 1994, following a year of teaching English at TF South. Throughout his impressive 31-year tenure at District 88, Mike has been a dedicated English teacher, who has taught virtually every course in the department, with the Humanities class becoming a staple of his teaching assignment through the years.

Beyond the classroom, Mike immersed himself in the school community by coaching football for 12 years, track for two years, and Scholastic Bowl for six years. His sponsorship activities included Students for a Better Environment and Chess Club, further demonstrating his commitment to enriching students' educational experiences.

Mike's passion for education was inspired by his own positive school experiences and the influential English teachers he encountered in high school and during his freshman year of college. A graduate of Grand Valley State University, he earned a bachelor's degree in English with a minor in Biology, which allowed him to begin his career teaching both subjects.

One of Mike's proudest achievements has been continuing the legacy of the Film class, which he took over and maintained

with dedication. He notes that between himself and Ralph Amelio, they have taught the course for the past 57 years.

What Mike cherished most about his role was the interaction with students and hearing from them after graduation about the impact he had on their lives. "Knowing that you have impacted them is an incredible feeling, and I appreciate when they share," he reflects.

In retirement, while he has no concrete plans yet, Mike looks forward to pursuing his many interests with good health on his side. An avid hiker, he plans to catch up on reading his extensive book collection and watching films. He also hopes to teach adult education courses and write a memoir.

Mike will most miss the daily interactions with students, particularly those special "lightbulb moments" when concepts suddenly click into place.





TO PREPARE STUDENTS TO BE  
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college and career ready in a diverse society.

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**Congratulations to the 2024-25 honorees!**

**Thank you for your years of service and dedication to the District 88 learning community!**