

A History of Public Education in Woodstock

Woodstock's public education system began unofficially in 1836 when Alvira Cornish taught a class of seven pupils in the house of Uriah Cottle, the first Dorr Township settler.

Ten years later, Woodstock schooling achieved public and official status when a schoolroom was set up in the frame courthouse on the public square. The teacher was David Richardson, formerly a mathematics professor from Norwich University in Vermont.

In 1847 the first schoolhouse was built in Woodstock on a school lot. Soon found to be too small, it was enlarged. In 1866 the building was sold, and in 1867 a brick building was erected at a cost of \$40,000. This was a fine three-story building, 60 x 90 feet, located on South Street and containing ten rooms, each 28 x 35, and a 45 x 60-foot assembly room on the third floor.

On April 5, 1873, the first Woodstock Board of Education was elected. Board members included John S. Wheat, John J. Murphy, M.D. Hoy, R. Diesel, George K. Bunker and D.E. Thomas. Mr. Wheat served a number of years on the school board during the early days. The first principal in Woodstock was Asa W. Young, who remained for one year and was succeeded by Lyman S. Knight. Knight remained for one year and was succeeded by W.C. Kline who served for two years. In 1877 Silas Wood became principal and served for two years. Wood was followed by Warren Wilkie, A.F. Bourne, J. B. Ester, C.R. Buchanan, A.D. Harris of New Jersey, and S.B. Hursh.

A statement appearing in the 1885 History referred to the Woodstock schools as "well graded and in admirable condition. The High School course is arranged with a view toward securing useful rather than ornamental scholarship. It embraces the natural sciences, history, bookkeeping, the higher mathematics, the English language, literature, etc."

Woodstock lived with its 3-story brick school until 1906 when, at a cost of \$25,999, a four-room building was erected on Clay Street. The former building burned to the ground on December 2, 1919. Two years later in January of 1921, the Clay Street School was enlarged and improved to eight rooms. In that same year a new 8-room grade school was erected on the corner of Dean Street and Forrest Avenue. That building is still the site of one of Woodstock's present elementary schools, Dean Elementary School.

District #72, City of Woodstock

The Clay Street and Dean Street schools made up the only school district in Woodstock at the time, District No. 72. The district's enrollment in 1921 was 898. In 1954 another school was built at 720 West Judd Street. Named after a popular band instructor in the district, Clarence Olson School became the third elementary school in District 72.

Dean Street School was enlarged in 1949, and in 1968 additions were built onto all three schools.

District #10, Rural Woodstock

Beginning in 1944, the rural area surrounding the city of Woodstock, consisting of 24½ independent rural school districts, was organized into one Rural Community Consolidated School District No. 10 for grades K through 8.

The merger came about as a result of concerns over the quality of education that the children were receiving. Many children of varying age groups were attending school in inadequate one-room school buildings which had limited educational equipment. There was a wide variation in the ability to financially support the schools' educational programs, and teachers were difficult to secure.

The original Board of Education for District 10 included Earl M. Hughes, president; Esther Young, secretary; George C. Smith, Ferd Raffel, Harold Birk, Alice McConnell and Roland Leisch.

After consolidation, two new elementary schools were built to replace the one-room schools. Westwood Elementary School and Greenwood Elementary School were completed in 1950. Additions to both schools were erected in 1953. In 1957 Greenwood was again enlarged and a third school, Northwood Elementary School, was built.

From 1946 to 1964 enrollment in District 10 schools increased from 250 students to over 1,250 students. In 1964 a bond issue was passed for additions to both the Northwood and Westwood schools. This work was completed in 1965.

District #152, Woodstock High School

On October 25, 1919, the voters of a four-township area – Dorr, Seneca, Hartland and Greenwood – decided overwhelmingly to form a Community High School District. By a vote of 1,112 to 58, District No. 152 was created.

The original portion of what is still the high school building was constructed in 1921. Members of the Board of Education that year were Luman T. Hoy, president; Wm. S. McConnell, secretary; John Bolger, Mrs. Mary Doolittle and Earl C. Hughes. Richard W. Bardwell was the school's superintendent.

Five additions were built onto the original 1921 structure during the time the high school operated as a separate school district. The first was in 1939 and included a swimming pool. The second and third additions were made in 1954 and 1957 and included areas for graphic arts and an auto shop. The fourth addition was built in 1959 onto the east side of the building and included a gymnasium, more classrooms and a music area. The fifth addition came in 1977 when space was added onto the west side of the school.

Woodstock Community Unit School District #200

In 1967 several citizens' committees began discussing and studying the feasibility of "unitizing" the three separate school districts that served the Woodstock community. In May 1968, a Citizens' Committee representing all three school districts issued a lengthy report recommending consolidation into a Unit School District. The primary advantages cited by the group were improved organization, coordinated student services, unification and articulation of the curriculum for all students, central planning and buying for all schools, more efficient use of school buildings, and increased financial aid from the state.

On July 19, 1969, a referendum calling for the formation of the Woodstock Community Unit School District No. 200 was approved, and on September 8, 1969, the newly elected Board of Education was seated. Members of the first District 200 Board of Education were Melvin Belcher, president; Donna Gregg, secretary; Ernest E. Bohn, Jr., Margaret Costello, Everett Marts, George Rasmussen and Richard Thompson.

District 200's first superintendent of schools was Dr. Roy J. Habeck, former superintendent of District 152. Verda Dierzen, former District 10 superintendent, and Randall Highsmith, former District 72 superintendent, were appointed assistant superintendents. John Radka was named business manager.

District 200 schools and their principals in 1969-70 were:

- Clay Street School Marguerite Desmond
- Dean Street School James A. Johnson
- Greenwood School William Schuette
- Northwood School Alice Ronan
- Olson School Harry Prather
- Westwood School Richard Pace
- Woodstock High School Gary Einerson

The enrollment in that year was 2,813 elementary students and 993 high school students.

In the fall of 1970, District 200 opened its eighth school, Northwood Junior High School, which was located next to Northwood Elementary School on north Seminary Avenue. Richard Pace was named the school's principal. Money for the construction of Northwood Junior High School was authorized by the voters under the 1968 referendum which also funded the additions to Clay, Dean and Olson schools.

The number of students attending District 200 schools grew to over 4,100 by 1978. But in the early '80's the district began to experience a decline in enrollment. By 1983 the district had lost approximately 400 students, and the Board of Education decided to close Clay Street School.

Westwood School was also closed during that year, but was reopened two years later in 1985 under an innovative new format called an "early learning center." All of the district's youngest students, including kindergarten, developmental first grade, pre-kindergarten and early childhood special education children, were combined under one roof, the Westwood Early Learning Center. Students in grades one through five were sent to Dean, Greenwood, Northwood Elementary or Olson School. Students in grades six through eight attended either Olson or Northwood Junior High.

In March 1986 voters in District 200 approved a referendum to increase the education fund tax rate in order to bring in needed revenue for the schools and avoid having to make serious cutbacks in programs and staff. The increase was for \$.98 per \$100 assessed valuation and was the first education fund increase since the district was formed in 1969.

District 200's enrollment decline was short-lived, and in 1989 the Board of Education reopened Clay Street School to accommodate the growing number of students attending its schools. At the same time, it was decided to move the younger students (grades 1-5) out of Olson and have it function solely as a junior high school (grades 6-8).

Coinciding with the move of the elementary students out of Olson was a change in philosophy of how best to educate students in grades six through eight. Beginning in 1989, the district's two junior high schools began a gradual transition to the "middle school concept" which emphasizes interdisciplinary programs, flexible/block scheduling, and advisor/advisee program and an exploratory curriculum. By 1991 the schools had progressed so successfully that they felt confident in changing their names to Northwood Middle School and Olson Middle School.

The number of students continued to increase during the early 1990's, climbing to over 5,000 for the first time in 1995. With the capacity of the current schools at 4,111 the Board of Education purchased a 120-acre piece of property on Raffel and Ware roads in 1991 in anticipation of the need for future school construction.

In November 1995 voters approved a referendum to build a new elementary school and add on to three other schools – Greenwood, Westwood and Northwood Middle School. The new elementary school opened in 1998 and was named after a local educator, Dr. Mary Endres, former superintendent of District 10 who spearheaded the consolidation of the 25 one-room rural schools and who later achieved national recognition as an innovator of parent and early childhood programs. In the same year, Northwood Elementary School was converted to the district's early learning center and was named after another prominent Woodstock educator, Verda Dierzen, who was superintendent of District 10 and the first assistant superintendent of District 200.

The November 1995 referendum also provided for \$5.4 million in betterment improvements at the high school. In November 1996, voters approved another referendum to add onto and renovate Woodstock High School. A companion request to increase the educational fund tax rate by 43 cents was also approved to cover the cost of hiring additional staff across the district. The high school expansion project, which was completed in 2001, was the most comprehensive of all the previous additions. It added 105,000 square feet of space to the building including a 15-classroom three-story science wing on the northeast side, a new gymnasium and Learning Resource Center, and a remodeled and expanded auditorium and Commons area.

In June 2000, the school district also completed construction of a new 12,600 square foot Transportation Center on Charles Road.

By early 2003, signs began emerging that District 200 was about to experience a significant increase in student enrollment. A record number of new residential subdivisions being constructed in the D-200 attendance area boosted enrollment by over 300 students between 2003 and 2004. In addition, long-range projections indicated that the school district could expect to gain up to 4,000 more students by 2013-2014 if the building trend continued. The challenge of responding to this growth was made even more critical by the fact that every school was already either at or over student capacity and 10 mobiles were being used as temporary classrooms.

In anticipation of the challenges posed by this impending growth, the Board of Education appointed a 60-member Facilities Study Task Force in August 2003 to make recommendations for the future. The Task Force was comprised of community members, parents and staff from every school, three board members and several administrators. After meeting for nearly a year, the Task Force presented a two-phase construction plan to the Board of Education that called for the immediate construction of a new elementary school, a new middle school, a new high school, an addition to the Verda Dierzen Early Learning Center, and the conversion of Olson Middle School to an elementary school.

Before taking action on the recommendations, the Board decided to give community members an opportunity to provide their feedback and suggestions through two public engagement processes called SchoolTalk200 and SchoolTalk2 Action. After considering the public's input, a \$105 million construction proposal was put on the ballot for the March 21, 2006 election. The referendum passed by a vote of 4,457 to 3,276.

In September 2007, the school district opened Prairiewood Elementary School and Creekside Middle School – a combined facility on a 34-acre site donated by the developer of Apple Creek Estates; a 16,000 sq. ft. addition to the Verda Dierzen Early Learning Center; and a completely renovated and improved Olson Elementary School which was formerly Olson Middle School. That same year the district also opened a therapeutic day school called Clay Academy in the building which was formerly Clay Elementary School. Clay Elementary was closed at the end of the 2006-2007 school year to prepare for the opening of Olson as an elementary school.

The final step in the construction plan was completed in September 2008 when District 200 opened its second high school, Woodstock North High School, on the Raffel Road property purchased by the Board in 1991. The 304,000 sq. ft. facility was designed to hold 1,600 students.

District 200 encompasses an area of approximately 110 square miles including the City of Woodstock, Bull Valley, Greenwood and portions of Wonder Lake and unincorporated McHenry County. The district currently operates twelve schools: Verda Dierzen Early Learning Center (PreK-K), Dean Elementary School (1-5), Mary Endres Elementary School (1-5), Greenwood Elementary School (1-5), Olson Elementary School (1-5), Prairiewood Elementary School (1-5), Westwood Elementary School (1-5), Creekside Middle School (6-8), Northwood Middle School (6-8), Woodstock High School (9-12), Woodstock North High School (9-12) and Clay Academy (PreK-12).

District 200 schools enjoy a longstanding tradition of excellence. Students consistently perform above average on state and national standardized achievement tests; and athletic, fine arts and co-curricular programs boast outstanding records of accomplishments. A number of schools at both the elementary and middle school level have received numerous national awards throughout the years for things ranging from best practices in education to character education programs. Both Woodstock High School and Woodstock North High School have been named multiple times to the *Washington Post* list of America's Most Challenging High Schools. In addition, Woodstock High School, in 2012, 2015 and 2016, earned the Silver Award in the *U.S. News and World Report* list of Best High Schools, placing it in the top 100 high schools in the state, and in the top 10% of all high schools nationally.

District 200 provides a comprehensive educational program for general, bilingual and special education students in pre-Kindergarten through 12th grade. Students receive an articulated, standards-based curriculum with a special emphasis on literacy and mathematics competencies. Planning, organization and accountability are key factors which have resulted in quality educational programs. District 200 was one of the first districts in McHenry County to offer a Dual Language program and one of the first in the state of Illinois to offer a comprehensive Pre-K to 12 program. In 2016 the District honored the first Dual Language graduating class – students for whom 50 percent of their classroom instruction since 1st grade was provided in English, and 50 percent was provided in Spanish.

The current superintendent of District 200 schools is Dr. Michael Moan who has held the position since July 2014. Dr. Moan succeeded Mrs. Ellyn Wrzeski who served as District 200's fourth superintendent from 2001-2014. District 200's first superintendent was Dr. Roy Habeck who served from 1969 until his retirement in June 1983. Gordon Wendlandt, who was assistant superintendent under Dr. Habeck for twelve years, succeeded him and served as superintendent from 1983-1986, followed by Dr. Joseph T. Hentges, who served from 1987-2001.

Seven citizens elected to four-year terms of office govern the school district. Their terms of office are staggered so that four are elected at one time and three are elected at another time. Representation on the District 200 Board of Education is limited to no more than three members from the same township, which include Hartland, Seneca, Dorr, Greenwood, McHenry and Nunda townships.