

Evanston Now

Evanston Swims! extends its reach into summer

By [Lisa Applegate](#) on June 2, 2015 - 11:50am



Thanks to a grant from the Evanston Community Foundation, Evanston Swims! will be able to provide fully-subsidized swim lessons this summer to participants most in need of swim instruction.

This grant will increase life-saving swim skills, continue to grow water safety knowledge, and help participants reach the swim competency of their peers.

Children who qualify will take swim lessons at either McGaw YMCA or YWCA Evanston/North Shore, two of the main collaborators in the effort to ensure that all Evanston children are safe in and around the water.

The children that are selected come from the Evanston/Skokie School District 65 and have participated in Evanston Swims! during the 2014-2015 school year.

Evanston Swims! continued to grow in its third year, reaching more children in more schools. More than 300 students travelled to several Evanston pools to participate in swim lessons and water safety instruction.

The program, which operates through a unique collaboration between the McGaw YMCA, YWCA Evanston/North Shore, Evanston/Skokie School District 65, and numerous volunteers, has grown from serving three District 65 schools its first year to serving eight this year -- Oakton, Lincoln, Dawes, Bessie Rhodes, King Arts, Washington, Walker and Lincolnwood.

“Evanston Swims! is a major community collaboration,” said Lori Siegel, McGaw YMCA Senior Director for Youth Development. “With the coordination of District 65, second graders receive lunch and bus transportation. Evanston School Children's Clothing Association provides swim suits, and the program is supported by the U.S. Coast Guard and their Auxillary for water safety instruction.”

Siegel said they are working to find additional pool space for another four elementary schools. Until then, staff and volunteers offered one day water safety awareness field trips this year to those schools.

“It has been great to reach more and more kids in the community,” said Pete Caragher, Director of YWCA Evanston/ North Shore Flying Fish Aquatics. “Our goals have been both to provide essential water safety instruction for all kids, and to identify the kids who have little to no experience in the water. Together with the McGaw YMCA, we will provide continual lessons over the summer for children we’ve

identified as most in need of more time in the water.”

Evanston Swims! grew out of the Evanston 150 community visioning project launched in 2011. Community members chose swim skills for all children as one of the top 10 goals for this lakeside community.

“The students look forward to this program every month,” said Washington Elementary School Principal Kate Ellison. “It has provided free swimming lessons to a large portion of our second grade students. This growing community partnership is making a difference in the lives of our students.”