

## Press Clippings 02/11/2019

---The Daily Herald---02/10/2019

### Suburban districts boosting pay, incentives to fill school bus driver jobs

By: Bob Susnjara



- Matthew Horn of Arlington Heights has been a school bus driver for four months and loves the job. "It's all about the kids," said Horn, a driver for Palatine Township Elementary District 15. School districts say they need more drivers like Horn to combat a national shortage.



- Palatine Township Elementary District 15 buses roll out before the sun comes up. School officials and industry experts say a strong job market has made it challenging to find enough drivers to fill their needs.

Scott Cochran is eager to get behind the wheel of his school bus every day at Palatine Township Elementary District 15.

With a steady stream of friendly riders, good pay and solid benefits, Cochran says there is plenty to like about the gig in his 10th year at Illinois' second-largest elementary district.

"Nobody really wakes up in the morning and says, 'I want to be a school bus driver,'" said Cochran, 53, a former banking professional. "I came here during a time where I needed the job. And I've come to find out, hey, I really like this, because I love the kids, it's really flexible. I can get stuff done during the day if I want to go shopping, do my laundry -- oh, my gosh."

But not everyone sees the upside of driving kids to school, according to student transportation associations and other experts. School districts in Illinois and across the country are struggling to attract drivers, with industry officials citing low unemployment and a strong economy among the reasons.

For students, that can mean longer rides and more time waiting for a bus to pick them up. In some instances, drivers are dropping off one group of students after classes, then returning to school to pick up more kids.

Along with boosting pay, private bus companies are offering perks such as cooking classes and wellness programs to attract and retain drivers.

"We try a little bit of everything," said John Benish Jr., president and chief operating officer of Oak Brook-based Cook-Illinois Corp. "We let some drivers take their buses home so they can get to work every day. We're very easygoing as far as taking time off."

Benish, whose company has 18 subsidiaries serving Chicago-area school districts and employs about 2,000 drivers, said other perks include parties, walking clubs and opportunities to see a nurse practitioner. He said he'd like to have another 140 drivers on staff.



- Bus drivers in Palatine Township Elementary District 15 like Frank Mole of Elgin are up early in the morning inspecting their buses before starting their routes. Suburban school districts and bus companies are battling a driver shortage with higher wages and additional perks.

At Palatine-based District 15, Director of Transportation Thomas Bramley said he began the school year short 20 or more drivers per day. The district-operated busing system should have at least 150 drivers to get 10,500 children to school daily.

"Added on to that, we had six long-term sick drivers, which brought our numbers down," Bramley said. "Then, of course, you have daily absenteeism. So, there were times at the beginning of the school year we were down to under 130 (drivers)."

The district was able to attract more drivers after starting pay went from \$17.18 an hour to \$19.18 on Jan. 1, to go along with medical and pension benefits for working about six hours a day for 9½ months. Bramley said 142 drivers now are employed and another nine are in training.

Drivers for Benish's company earn up to \$19.50 an hour, plus medical benefits and bonus opportunities related to safety and perfect attendance.

Industry experts say one problem in finding or keeping drivers, who must be 21 or older, is that the job typically doesn't offer 40 hours a week. Then there is the Illinois Department of Transportation criteria they must meet, such as obtaining a Class B commercial license, passing a drug screening, having a clean driving record and going through training.

"We used to lose drivers to other (school bus) driving jobs," said Benish, who is president-elect of the National School Transportation Association. "But now, we're

losing drivers to everything. Full-time work, Lyft, Uber, a lot of delivery companies out there. You see everybody wants stuff delivered now. And you see everybody's hiring."

Although Elgin Area School District U-46 is OK for now with 343 drivers, it continues to seek applicants in an effort to sustain transportation for roughly 27,000 students a day, spokeswoman Mary Fergus said. To recruit drivers, the district has yard signs touting the job throughout U-46's boundaries.

Stevenson High School District 125 in Lincolnshire, which contracts with First Student Inc., has bus drivers for all 71 routes serving about 1,900 students, spokesman Jim Conrey said. Nonetheless, First Student held a job fair in unincorporated Prairie View near Lincolnshire last week to attract more drivers.

Stevenson helps First Student keep the driver numbers up.

"For example, we are working with our Sodexo (food service) employees to see if anyone is interested in driving a morning route or an afternoon route depending on their scheduled shift," Conrey said. "Also, we pay for training of our special education aides to get their certification so they can drive a bus for athletics and other co-curricular events."

Cochran, the Palatine District 15 driver, said there could be a misperception about the job that's keeping potential drivers away.

"People are just afraid of kids sometimes," he said. "They're like, 'Oh my gosh, I've got to drive this big bus. How am I supposed to do that?'"

"And (after) they get here and go through the training, they say, 'Oh, this isn't so hard. Oh, I really like this.' That's what happened to me."

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## **Elgin math teacher goes beyond classroom to impact students**

**By: Madhu Krishnamurthy**



- Marty Angelo teaches sixth-graders at Harriet Gifford Elementary School in Elgin. Here, he works with Montez Miller, 11, in math class.



- Marty Angelo, who teaches sixth-grade math at Harriet Gifford Elementary School in Elgin, recently was honored for his dedication and service by the Chicago Bears and Symetra with a "Hero in the Classroom Award."



- Sixth-grade math teacher Marty Angelo has spent 22 years at Harriet Gifford Elementary School in Elgin. This school year has been his most challenging after the death of his wife, Melodie, from cancer in September.



- Marty Angelo recently was honored for his dedication and service by the Chicago Bears and Symetra with a "Hero in the Classroom Award."



- Marty Angelo always goes above and beyond for his students, including riding the bus home with them each day, making home visits after too many absent days, and attending their sporting events on the weekends.



- Marty Angelo, back center, with his sixth-graders from Harriet Gifford Elementary School in Elgin participating in Girls on the Run in Joliet.



- Marty Angelo received the Chicago Bears/Symetra "Hero in the Classroom Award" earlier this school year for his dedication to students.

When it comes to teaching students with behavioral challenges, Marty Angelo's strategy involves extending a hand of friendship beyond the classroom.

Whether attending sporting events when students invite him or inquiring about their weekend activities, Angelo tries his best to offer support.

### **Tips from a top teacher**

- Although academics are important, there is more to school. Build relationships with your students and families.
- When students extend invitations, try to accept and do your best to support them.
- Provide positive reinforcement and rewards to motivate students.
- As difficult as it can be at times, maintain a calm and kind demeanor so that all who are around you will feel comfortable and find you approachable.
- Provide opportunities for students to seek extra help.
- Never hesitate to help anyone (adults and children).
- Keep an open mind for constant learning, changing and evolving.
- Build a strong communication with parents.
- Involve students and parents with personal and academic goal-setting.



- Get involved with school and family functions.
- When families do not have the means to make student goal-setting conferences, offer to meet on middle grounds, such as a restaurant, or offer a home visit.
- Get involved with school committees.
- Have a relatable sense of humor.

It's about building relationships with students and their families, said Angelo, a sixth-grade math teacher at Harriet Gifford Elementary School in Elgin, where he has taught for 22 years.

"I try to connect with students through a variety of ways," Angelo said. "Sometimes, when I hear about an activity, I will surprise students by just showing up. I build relationships with them through their interests."

That interest in their personal lives matters to the 16 students in his class who often have endured traumatic experiences. Harriet Gifford is among the early adopters in Elgin Area School District U-46 of a trauma-informed care approach to teaching students of poverty and with multiple adverse childhood experiences.

"It's taking the time to try to understand where that behavior is coming from ... knowing what upsets or triggers them," Angelo said. "They have come a long way. We had a lot of personality conflicts at the beginning of the year."

This school year perhaps has been Angelo's most challenging after his wife, Melodie, was diagnosed with cancer and died in September. Angelo said it was hard taking two weeks off from teaching right at the beginning of the school year.

"This is such a critical part of the year to get the foundations started," he said. "As fifth-graders, many of them went through three teachers during the course of the year. 'Are you going to leave us, too?' was the first question when they came. That just crushed me."

Angelo cut short his mourning to return to the classroom because he didn't want his students to feel like he was abandoning them. Teaching also was therapeutic, he said.

"For many of these kids, school is probably their only refuge or safe place," Angelo said. "Some kids, they go home to an empty house (as) parents are working late. The older kids have to run the house, take care of younger siblings. That's a big responsibility. Those types of dynamics make things challenging here."

Getting involved with parents, connecting with students outside the school, even riding the bus home with them are ways Angelo builds trust with his wards.

"It gives them a sense of security that they get home safely," Angelo said. "They all know me. We have that rapport. Teachers and students all have the same needs. The only thing that separates us is our experiences."

When families don't have the means to make student goal-setting conferences, Angelo offers to meet them at a restaurant or makes a home visit.

For his dedication and service to his students, Angelo was recognized with a [Chicago Bears/Symetra "Hero in the Classroom Award."](#) Angelo was among 16 kindergarten through grade 12 teachers in the Chicago area honored during the 2018 NFL season. He was recognized at the Oct. 21 home game between the Bears and the New England Patriots.

During a surprise classroom visit in October, Chicago Bears board Chairman George McCaskey gave Angelo an array of prizes, including a \$2,000 check for classroom books and supplies, Bears swag and tickets to a game at Soldier Field.

"I don't think about the extra things that I do as being a hero in the classroom," Angelo said. "It's just who I am, what I do."

Though his teaching techniques change with each new batch of students, one constant is Angelo's unwavering dedication to helping everyone.

He tailors rewards for good behavior, such as time for open gym, being on the computer or drawing, special lunch with him, homework passes, listening to music in class while working on assignments, or tickets to sporting events. He typically asks students what type of reward they would like to work toward and does a drawing each week.

"If they didn't really care about some of the reward opportunities, they aren't going to work too hard for it," Angelo said. "There are kids who are going to push and test it. It's also learning to pick your battles. Patience was something I learned over time."

Maintaining a calm and kind demeanor is key for students to feel comfortable and find him approachable, Angelo said.

"It's probably made me more relaxed. Some teachers get burned out over behavioral issues," Angelo said. "You just learn how to make adjustments to the behaviors and how you respond. It is very much like parenting. Our classroom is a family."

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## **Early learning organization receives donation**

**By: Michelle Mullins**



- The Elgin Partnership for Early Learning will give away 100 PopSockets with educational reminders to read, write, talk, and play written on them using a \$500 grant from Logotech.

Logotech has given a \$500 donation to the Elgin Partnership for Early Learning, which will give away 100 PopSockets with educational reminders to read, write, talk and play written on them.

PopSockets are grips to put on the back of a cell phone to make it easier to hold or function as a phone stand.

These PopSockets will be printed in English or Spanish with the “Talk – Play – Read – Do – Write ... Give Me Five!” handprint logo used by Elgin Area School District U46.

U46 uses this philosophy to encourage parents and caregivers to do those actions with their children each day.

The Elgin Partnership for Early Learning is Logotech’s first grant recipient in its Logotech-4-Good initiative. The program gives a \$500 grant of branded promotional products to a school, educational or nonprofit organization selected by the company each month.

A donation event will be held at 3 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 14, at Blue Kangaroo Laundry, 464 Summit St., Elgin. Parents of preschool-aged children interested in receiving a free PopSocket are invited to attend and learn more about the program.

## **---The Courier-News---02/10/2019**

### **What’s a school day?**

Lawmakers may bring back 5-hour rule, but Elgin-area districts say they’d like more flexibility

**By: Rafael Guerrero and Suzanne Baker**



- Teacher Jose Rosa works with his class at Huff Elementary School in Elgin. If the state doesn’t reinstate a rule mandating five-hour classroom days, districts would have more flexibility to offer online and blended classes, work experiences and field trips, officials say.

School districts in the Elgin area and across the state are rethinking what is defined as a day of school.

In the past, a school day was mandated by the state to be five hours of direct supervision by a teacher, and how the state funded schools was based on student attendance during those days.



In August 2017, the evidence-based funding formula was signed into law, shifting the way state money is allocated to school enrollment figures and the number of students in need of extra supports.

Because funding was no longer tied to attendance, the law also opened the door to more flexibility in terms of where and how students received instruction.

Ralph Grimm, acting chief education officer at the Illinois State Board of Education, issued a Nov. 9 memorandum that said as a result of the new funding formula, an instructional day need not be confined to classroom-based instruction.

“Students learn in a variety of ways and settings. Districts may define student engagement and student learning in any number or combination of ways: classroom instruction, online instruction, independent research projects, work-based learning and internships, to name a few,” he noted in the memo.

Fearing schools might take flexibility too far, the Illinois Senate Education Committee, chaired by Sen. Jennifer Bertino-Tarrant, D-Shorewood, unanimously approved a measure to reinstate the five-hour mandate. Bertino-Tarrant is the former Will County regional superintendent of education.

State Rep. Fred Crespo has filed a similar bill in the House. The Hoffman Estates Democrat, who represents a portion of School District U46, called the removal of the class day language “accidental.”

“These questions were never asked, never vetted and this posed a lot of problems,” he said. “This bill is basically correcting something not intended when we passed (evidence-based funding).”

School districts could abuse the flexibility and still get state funding, he said. And it could pose problems for families who need a set start and end time for school to plan work and child care schedules, he said.

But some school administrators welcome the change and don’t want the five-hour mandate reinstated.

Indian Prairie School District 204 Superintendent Karen Sullivan told a group of legislators recently that students today are involved in internships, job shadowing, and online or blended courses.

“All those things don’t fit into a five-hour, neat instructional day,” she said.

With students having access to laptop computers, schools could offer e-learning days instead of taking the day off school because of the weather or an election day, Sullivan said.

District U46 is in the process of setting up its 2019-20 school year calendar, which could include as many as 11 early release days — something that couldn’t happen if a five-hour school day was in place.

Melanie Meidel, District U46 assistant superintendent for special projects, told the school board last week that students would be assigned digital learning work on those days that would free up teachers to do professional development, collaborate on projects, grade assignments and hold parent-teacher conferences.

“If they maintain this flexibility, it would be very interesting,” Meidel said. “My personal opinion? I think would be a very marvelous thing if we could consistently look at something each month conceptually.”

District spokeswoman Mary Fergus said the flexibility could be particularly beneficial as the district moves forward with its career pathways plan. In addition to classroom instruction, students could pursue other things related to their career goal, such as work-based learning opportunities outside school, she said.

St. Charles School District 303 Superintendent Jason Pearson’s position is similar to Sullivan’s. The possibility of redefining what constitutes class time opens the door to so many types of learning opportunities, he said.

“E-learning, blended learning, internships, field trips, dual credit and dual enrollment are all programs District 303 hopes to continue to expand,” Pearson said.

“A flexible school day provides increased opportunities for students and staff to engage in a variety of learning modalities and experiences.”

Crespo said he understands the flexibility school administrators are seeking but fears the General Assembly didn’t adequately discuss the issue before eliminating the five-hour day.

He plans to add language to his bill that could add some of the flexibility districts want although he’s not yet sure what the changes will be, he said.

“We have school districts that want this flexibility, I get that,” Crespo said. “But no one is disputing that when (evidence-based funding) was passed, there was no discussion” on how long an instructional day should be, he said.

## **SPORTS**

**---The Daily Herald---02/09/2019**

### **West Aurora hits 100 in win over Streamwood**

**By: Kevin McGavin**

The points accumulated like the famous Who song about the pinball wizard Friday night in Streamwood.

Keenon Cole, the Northern Illinois University-bound star player the Sabres, pumped in a game-high 40 points.

But the Cole effort was an afterthought as West Aurora downed the Sabres in a hard-to-fathom-high school basketball boys game score of 103-93.

"We gave up 90 points but scored 103," West Aurora star senior guard Marquise Walker said.

Streamwood climbed ever so close to the Upstate Eight Conference-leading Blackhawks in the fourth quarter.

But the Sabres had the misfortune of facing Walker during the final eight minutes of the contest.

Walker drained the epitome of daggers from beyond the 3-point line in scoring a team-best 27 points Friday night.

"I had to knock them down," Walker said.

"I never thought of a West Aurora team scoring that many points," West Aurora coach Brian Johnson said. "I am happy we got the win. That's all I care about right now."

West Aurora never trailed in the high-octane contest.

The Blackhawks scored 30 points in the first quarter alone.

Hezzy Salter matched the Blackhawks' Walker output of 27 points.

The Salter performance was highlighted by a nefarious tip dunk off a Walker miss in the third quarter.

West Aurora seemingly scored at will in building an astonishing 56-45 lead at halftime.

The Blackhawks' starting point guard, Traevon Brown, was masterful in scoring 18 points against the Sabres.

West Aurora breakout junior Kevin Balfour added 16 points as the Blackhawks reached triple figures for the first time since the Kenny Battle era of 1983-84.

But Cole certainly gave the conference leaders all they could handle.

The Streamwood star forward scored in every imaginable fashion.

From throw downs in traffic to jumpers from beyond the arc, Cole was an imposing force in the game.

"Keenon Cole is a great player," Walker said. "He was scoring constantly."

"I had 40 earlier this year," Cole said. "It was my second 40-point game this year. West Aurora is very good in transition. They killed us on the fast break."

Streamwood, which also received double-digit efforts from Nikola Sinik (14 points) and Nick Droll (10), was still in shouting distance with an 84-81 deficit in the fourth quarter,

But Walker found nothing but neylon with 3-pointers moments later.

The Blackhawks' cushion was soon back to double figures as a result.

"I was hoping it would be us," Cole said of the outcome.

The Sabres could not stop the unheralded Salter in the post.

West Aurora scored 77 points in the first three quarters before shading the Sabres 26-25 in the final quarter of the combined 196 points.

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## **South Elgin slows down Glenbard East on Senior Night**

**By Allen Oshinski**

South Elgin's seniors put on a defensive clinic on Senior Night.

The Storm held Glenbard East to five fourth-quarter points while pulling away for a 59-41 Upstate Eight Conference win in South Elgin.

The Storm led just 40-36 after three quarters, but a Trace Ashby 3-pointer to open the fourth got South Elgin rolling and the Storm continued to pull away thereafter.

"On four possessions in a row we came down and took quick shots," said South Elgin coach Brett Johnson. "I called that timeout and said, 'Guys, just move the ball and be patient.' Ashby hit a 3 and that got us going. That's all they have to do is just be patient on offense and understand that eventually the defense will break down and you'll get the shot that you want. And that's what we did for four or five possessions in a row, and that's what helped us extend the lead and kind of put a clamp on it."

The Storm's senior-laden lineup didn't want to go out with a loss.

"Last year when I was a junior we didn't get the win on Senior Night," said Drake Montgomery. "This year I didn't want that to happen to me."

Montgomery's 20 points led the way for South Elgin (19-6, 12-2). Vincent Miskiewicz had 12 points, 18 rebounds and 3 blocks for the Storm but it was the defense that propelled the Storm to the win.

"We were preaching that all week that you've got to play defense, and it showed today," Miskiewicz said. "We allowed 41 against a very good Glenbard East team."

"That's our best defensive performance of the year to lock down defensively when offensively we really struggled," Johnson said.

Daron Hall (12 points) and Alijah Nelson (10) led the way for Glenbard East (11-15, 7-8), but the Rams couldn't get anything going inside with Miskiewicz patrolling the paint.

"(Miskiewicz) is very active defensively," said Glenbard East coach Scott Miller. "He makes things very tough inside. So I give him a lot of credit, he's really good."

"I thought we did a nice job, we cut it to four in the fourth quarter and we just couldn't get that stop or the bucket when we needed it."

Another senior, Jace Warrick, added 8 points for South Elgin, which opened up a double-digit lead in the third quarter only to watch the Rams come back and cut it to four twice. Freshman Lane McVicar added 7 points off the bench for South Elgin.

Jeremy Johnson and Deon Cook scored 7 points apiece for Glenbard East.