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U-46 students, staff support local families in need

BY MADHU KRISHNAMURTHY



Students at Harriet Gifford Elementary School are collecting canned food through Friday benefiting the Salvation Army and Elgin Community Crisis Center food pantries.

Courtesy of Joe Corcoran

Several Elgin-area schools are hosting canned food, clothing and toy drives through Dec. 22 -- the last day of school before winter break -- benefiting local families in need.

Students and employees of Elgin Area School District U-46 are celebrating this holiday season by helping community organizations spread the cheer and much-needed supplies.

Throughout this month, students at 17 U-46 elementary schools, Abbott Middle School, Elgin, Larkin and Streamwood high schools and the DREAM Academy have been collecting change, winter coats, hats, mittens, scarves, shoes, socks, toys, canned food and paper goods, among other activities.

"It's really heartwarming to see the kids giving back to the community and doing a service project," said Joe Corcoran, principal of Harriet Gifford Elementary School in Elgin.

The school is in the midst of its annual canned food drive -- a 20-year tradition -- benefiting the Salvation Army and Elgin Community Crisis Center food pantries.

Of Harriet Gifford's 440 students, 83 percent come from low-income backgrounds. Some of its families are among the beneficiaries, Corcoran said.

Students are encouraged to consult with their parents before giving. Those who can contribute do, while staff members and teachers also help toward the effort.

Last year, the school collected about 2,000 canned goods split between the two food pantries. This year's goal is the same, Corcoran said.

"Right now, we have about 800 items in," Corcoran said. "Our goal is to have 100 items per classroom. That's only four items per kid. We try to make it something that is reachable for kids. They have a big heart. And the families that give back and give out to the pantries ... they appreciate what these organizations do in our community."

A special free dinner with Santa is planned for Harriet Gifford families Thursday night.



Wrapped presents for children on the U-46 Giving Tree recipient list are stacked in the district's Human Resources Department awaiting distribution next week. Employees in Elgin Area School District U-46's Educational Services Center picked more than 200 children whose wishes they granted this holiday season.

Courtesy of Elgin Area School District U-46

At the district headquarters, Educational Services Center employees are wrapping up gift donations for their fifth annual Giving Tree.

"We adopted a little over 200 students this year," said Melanie Meidel, assistant superintendent for human resources.

Students selected provide a list of three wishes that are fulfilled by district employees. Hundreds of wrapped presents -- including bicycles, clothing, boots, gym shoes, headphones, toiletries, toys, crafts and gift cards -- are piled up in Meidel's office awaiting distribution next week.

"We make sure that everybody has all their wishes," Meidel said. "This is a true loving, giving moment that everybody really enjoys. It brings us together."

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Governor candidate Ives: 'Every school district should be a unit district'

BY MAMI PYKE



Jeanne Ives, while saying she believes in consolidating school districts, says that's not the case with all districts. "Elgin (Area Unit District 46) and Chicago (Public Schools) are too big, actually. They need to be downsized," she said. - Mark Welsh | Staff Photographer

Small school districts with big budgets are sucking up taxes across Illinois and should be consolidated, Republican candidate for governor and state Rep. Jeanne Ives said Wednesday.

"First thing, every school district should be a unit district," Ives of Wheaton told the Daily Herald editorial board. "No more high school districts, no more elementary districts."

Ives is challenging Gov. Bruce Rauner in the March 20 Republican primary election, while seven Democrats are vying for their party's nomination.

Consolidating school districts would cut expenses and reduce property taxes as well as benefit students, Ives said.

"Florida's got one school district per county," she said. "In Illinois, we've got 852 (districts in 102 counties). This is where you get your savings."

For example, Ives suggested, Glenbard High School District 87 serving northeast DuPage County communities could absorb elementary school districts that feed into it.

She also cited the example of Winfield School District 34, which has two schools, saying it could merge with the much-larger Wheaton Warrenville Unit District 200, which also serves part of Winfield.

"(Those two schools) could easily be absorbed in District 200," Ives said. "Get rid of that school district. Done."



Republican candidate for governor Jeanne Ives of Wheaton says she believes in consolidating school districts. "Florida's got one school district per county," she said. "In Illinois, we've got 852 (districts in 102 counties)." *Mark Welsh | Staff Photographer*

Such reforms, she stressed, wouldn't necessarily mean losing local control or traditions.

"It doesn't mean give up the school's mascot. It means the administration and all that goes up to the (larger) school district level."

However, Ives also said some large school districts are unwieldy.

"Elgin (Area Unit District 46) and Chicago (Public Schools) are too big, actually. They need to be downsized," she said.

"At the same time, you cannot have 'zombie schools.' You can't have 140 kids in a high school and think that you're going to have a good result and have the resources to provide for them."

Earlier in 2017, Rauner signed legislation to make consolidating units of government easier.

Over the years, districts in St. Charles and Geneva, Wood Dale and Bensenville, and Mount Prospect and Elk Grove Township, to name a few, have faced possible mergers.

District 34 Superintendent Matt Rich said the district had looked at consolidation previously and conducted feasibility studies. He said the district already cooperates with West Chicago High School District 94, Benjamin Elementary District 25 and West Chicago Elementary District 33

"It's not a new idea," Rich said. "Every study has remarked on how well we've used our resources together and that it would be disadvantageous to do this. You would need to ask High School District 94 what it would do if it no longer had us as part of their tax base."