

Press Clippings 12/8/2017

---New York Times--- 12/8/17

How Effective Is Your School District? A New Measure Shows Where Students Learn the Most

BY EMILY BADGER AND KEVIN QUEALY



Students in gym class at Mildred I. Lavizzo Elementary School in Chicago. "Whatever kids come in here, we know we can grow them," the school's principal, Tracey Stelly, says. Lyndon French for The New York Times

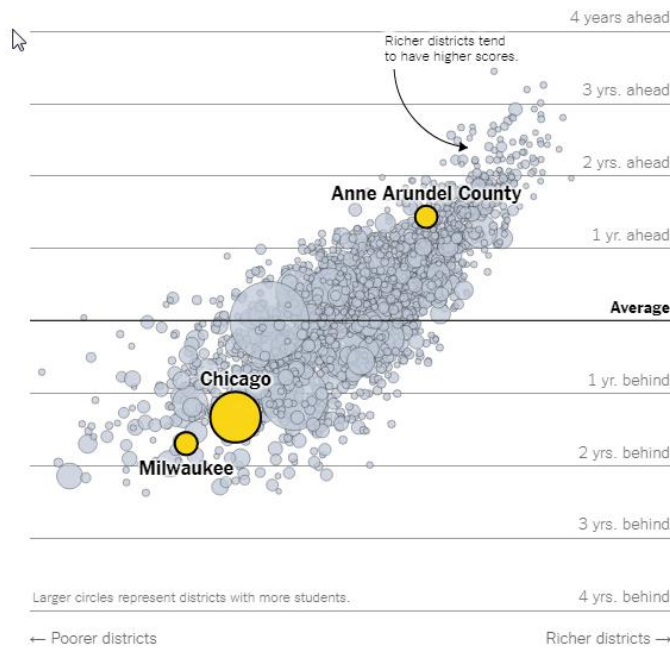
CHICAGO — In the Chicago Public Schools system, enrollment has been declining, the budget is seldom enough, and three in four children come from low-income homes, a profile that would seemingly consign the district to low expectations. But students here appear to be learning faster than those in almost every other school system in the country, according to new data from researchers at Stanford.

The data, based on some 300 million elementary-school test scores across more than 11,000 school districts, tweaks conventional wisdom in many ways. Some urban and Southern districts are doing better than data typically suggests. Some wealthy ones don't look that effective. Many poor school systems do.

This picture, and Chicago's place in it, defy how we typically think about wealth and education in America. It's true that children in prosperous districts tend to test well, while children in poorer districts on average score lower. But in this analysis, which measures how scores grow as student cohorts move through school, the Stanford researcher Sean Reardon argues that it's possible to separate some of the advantages of socioeconomics from what's actually happening in schools.

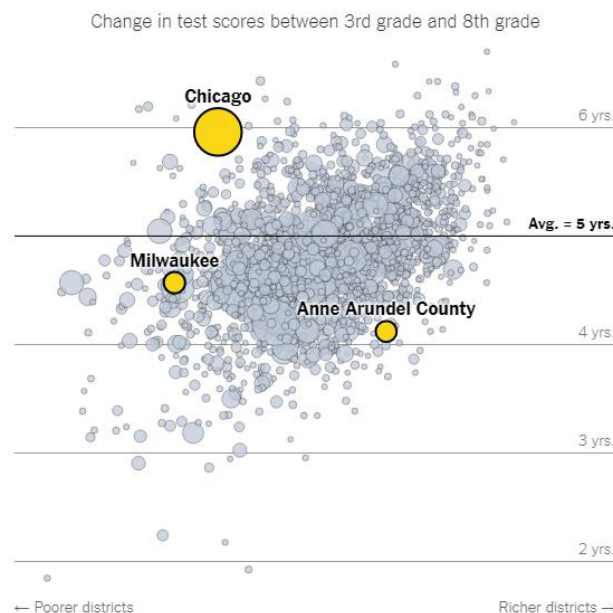
In Chicago, third graders collectively test below the second-grade level on reading and math. But this data shows that over the next five years, they receive the equivalent of six years of education. By the eighth grade, their scores have nearly caught up to the national average:

*Test scores for **3rd graders** in 2,000 large school districts.*



By comparison, children in the Milwaukee Public Schools test at similarly low rates in the third grade but advance more slowly, leaving them even further behind by the eighth grade. In Maryland's Anne Arundel County, third graders test above the national average. But growth there lags behind Chicago, where the poverty rate is about five times higher.

Across the country, this analysis shows, the wealth of a district tells us little about the effectiveness of its schools.



“One question we’ve been asking ourselves is: Do urban public school systems simply reflect the poverty of the kids in the schools, or do they overcome those effects to any degree?” said Michael Casserly, the executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, which represents large urban districts.

This new data shows that many do overcome them. It also suggests that states that rate schools and select which ones to reward or shutter based on average test scores are using the wrong metric, Mr. Reardon argues. And so are parents who rely on publicly available test scores to identify what they believe are the best school districts — and so the best places to live.

“Most people think there’s some signal in that,” Mr. Reardon said of average test scores. “But it’s a pretty bad signal.”

Standardized tests, he acknowledges, are an incomplete measure of educational success, and some places like the state of Massachusetts have tried to include measures of growth in evaluating teachers and schools because of the limitations that Mr. Reardon points to.

Even the Chicago Teachers Union, however, warns that standardized tests don’t measure the richness of a curriculum, or whether students have access to librarians and college counselors. Mr. Reardon’s data also can’t detect when changes occur because students leave or enter a district between third and eighth grade. So demographic change may affect growth rates in a place like Anne Arundel, which has experienced an influx of children who are still learning English.

Educators have long debated whether it’s better to evaluate students and schools on proficiency levels or growth rates. Mr. Reardon’s data makes possible a national database of both. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 required states to conduct their own assessments in reading and math. This analysis converts those state scores, from 2009 to 2015, into a common standard measured in grade levels.

Districts with high growth are scattered across the country, in contrast with sharp geographic divisions on proficiency that show Northern schools ahead of those in the Deep South. School systems across Arizona and Tennessee that appear to test well below national averages are in fact overperforming in growth. Many predominantly minority districts where third graders start behind have high growth rates. But in New York City, where third graders test at the national average, slow growth puts them at a disadvantage later.

Highest growth rates

SCHOOL DISTRICT	GROWTH AFTER 5 YEARS
City of Chicago ILL.	6.0 yrs.
Chandler Unified District ARIZ.	5.8 yrs.
Seattle Public Schools WASH.	5.7 yrs.
Leander TEX.	5.7 yrs.
Salem-Keizer 24J ORE.	5.7 yrs.
Plano TEX.	5.7 yrs.
Orleans Parish LA.	5.7 yrs.
Garden Grove Unified CALIF.	5.7 yrs.
Frisco TEX.	5.6 yrs.
Peoria Unified School District ARIZ.	5.6 yrs.
Fremont Unified CALIF.	5.6 yrs.
Fort Bend TEX.	5.6 yrs.
Capistrano Unified CALIF.	5.6 yrs.
Alpine District UTAH	5.6 yrs.
Chula Vista Elementary CALIF.	5.5 yrs.
Washington Elementary School District ARIZ.	5.5 yrs.
Round Rock TEX.	5.5 yrs.
Keller TEX.	5.5 yrs.
Arlington TEX.	5.4 yrs.
SD U-46 ILL.	5.4 yrs.

Among the 200 largest school districts.

Lowest growth rates

SCHOOL DISTRICT	GROWTH AFTER 5 YEARS
Rochester City School District N.Y.	2.9 yrs.
Montgomery County ALA.	3.0 yrs.
Baltimore City Public Schools MD.	3.2 yrs.
Mobile County ALA.	3.5 yrs.
Escambia FLA.	3.6 yrs.
Marion FLA.	3.7 yrs.
Tulsa OKLA.	3.8 yrs.
Volusia FLA.	3.9 yrs.
Lake FLA.	3.9 yrs.
Henrico Co. Public Schools VA.	3.9 yrs.
Polk FLA.	3.9 yrs.
Duval FLA.	4.0 yrs.
Jefferson County ALA.	4.0 yrs.
Atlanta Public Schools GA.	4.0 yrs.
Pharr-San Juan-Alamo TEX.	4.0 yrs.
Buffalo City School District N.Y.	4.0 yrs.
Clay FLA.	4.1 yrs.
Wichita KAN.	4.1 yrs.
Anne Arundel County Public Schools MD.	4.1 yrs.
Pinellas FLA.	4.1 yrs.

Even the fastest growth rates Mr. Reardon measures couldn't completely close the proficiency gap that exists early on between typical poor and wealthy districts. That suggests that the most effective school systems alone can't overcome all the disadvantages of poverty that accumulate before children even reach third grade and that shape the country's racial achievement gaps.

There is promise, however, in a place like Chicago.

"Here's the third-biggest school system in the country that's dramatically outperforming not just the other big poor districts, but almost every district in the country, at scale," Mr. Reardon said. If we understood what was causing that, in Chicago and other disadvantaged but high-growth districts, that might help reduce educational inequality, he said.



Lavizzo Elementary School in Chicago serves a student population that's 98 percent black and 93 percent low income. Lyndon French for The New York Times

Even within this city, there's broad disbelief in good news about the schools, in how they could succeed amid perpetual budget cuts, contentious school closings, rising crime and financial crisis.

But Mr. Reardon finds no evidence of inflated test scores in the district (by contrast, the recent cheating scandal in Atlanta is apparent in his data). Researchers at the University of Chicago and the University of Illinois at Chicago have also pointed to positive results for Chicago, relative to the rest of Illinois, and using other metrics.

"At some point, you've got to say, 'O.K., this is getting to be an accurate picture,'" Mayor Rahm Emanuel said. The district has come far from 30 years ago, Mr. Emanuel notes, when Education Secretary William Bennett described the city's schools as the worst in the country.

"I do wonder, if our students were not predominantly minority and poor, would people have the same level of skepticism?" said Janice Jackson, the district's chief education officer since 2015 and a former teacher and principal in the system. "In public education we talk all the time about 'beating the odds,' about public education as 'the great equalizer.' But when we see it happen, we question it."



Computer class at Lavizzo Elementary School on the far South Side of Chicago. Lyndon French for The New York Times

Mr. Reardon's data shows that every demographic group within the district is growing at rates well above the national average, with Hispanic students outpacing whites. But while growth is broadly distributed, the pattern in Chicago and across the country means that black-white achievement gaps aren't narrowing much even in the districts with the strongest growth.

On the city's far South Side, scores have risen at Mildred I. Lavizzo Elementary School, which serves a student population that's nearly 98 percent black and 93 percent low income. Several homes across the street are boarded up, and the area has lost population and jobs. Inside the school, the halls are decorated with emblems of other places: college banners, foreign flags, clocks that tell the time in Nairobi and Dublin.

Tracey Stelly, the principal since 2009, has brought in every enhancement she can find. The school uses an International Baccalaureate curriculum. The students read the Junior Great Books. The school hosts a community farmer's market. Outside groups lead choir classes and organized games at recess.

"Whatever kids come in here, we know we can grow them," Ms. Stelly said. She peered into the gymnasium one afternoon this fall while the fifth graders were dancing with their teachers to celebrate a schoolwide fund-raising project. "When kids come in the building," she said, "they know, 'This is where I belong.'"

At Lavizzo, the district's emphasis on data and performance tracking is also conveyed to students in a manner Ms. Stelly hopes will inspire competition while remaining playful. One first-floor bulletin board updates the school's attendance targets. Another records goals that students have set for their standardized test scores.

Across the district, data about attendance and grades is being used to identify the students likely to need extra attention. And the district has emphasized the role of more autonomous principals in improving instruction, an element of reform that Mr. Emanuel said is underappreciated nationally in debates that more often focus on teachers.



Students at Chicago's Lavizzo Elementary School learn an International Baccalaureate curriculum. Lyndon French for The New York Times

The mayor has pushed other changes, including a longer school day and expanded pre-K, but those policies have shifted too recently to explain all the gains in Mr. Reardon's data. Mr. Casserly suggests that Chicago and other large urban districts have been focused for years on the quieter work of defining what "grade level" actually means and how to get children there.

Between all these changes, it's hard to untangle what's been most effective, said Elaine Allensworth, who leads an education research consortium at the University of Chicago that works with the district. But she is confident the results are real.

"I go into schools now and I see places that are very different from what I saw 15 years ago," she said. "It's much more collaborative among teachers and data-focused, and focused on students."

Compare your school district with its neighbors

DISTRICT	GROWTH AFTER 5 YEARS	NAT. PCT.	MEDIAN INC.
City of Chicago ILL.	6.0 yrs.	97th	\$38k
Hoover-Schrum Memorial ILL.	5.7 yrs.	93rd	\$45k
Somonauk ILL.	5.4 yrs.	82nd	\$82k
Palatine CCSD ILL.	5.3 yrs.	79th	\$78k
Arlington Heights ILL.	5.1 yrs.	66th	\$106k
Cook County ILL.	5.0 yrs.	59th	\$46k
Hillside ILL.	4.7 yrs.	44th	\$54k
Ottawa ESD ILL.	4.7 yrs.	43rd	\$53k
Dixon USD ILL.	4.6 yrs.	36th	\$55k
Summit Hill ILL.	4.6 yrs.	36th	\$102k
Waukegan ILL.	4.5 yrs.	32nd	\$43k
Orland ILL.	4.3 yrs.	22nd	\$92k
Rankin CSD ILL.	4.3 yrs.	21st	\$73k
Lincoln ESD 27 ILL.	4.3 yrs.	21st	\$46k
Paris-Union ILL.	4.3 yrs.	19th	\$35k
Casey-Westfield 4C ILL.	4.2 yrs.	18th	\$50k
Olympia ILL.	4.2 yrs.	17th	\$72k
Mazon-Verona-Kinsman ESD 2C ILL.	4.2 yrs.	16th	\$67k
Pana ILL.	4.1 yrs.	14th	\$47k
La Harpe CSD ILL.	2.9 yrs.	1st	-

National percentiles are based on school districts with reliable data.



Recess at Lavizzo Elementary School in Chicago. Lyndon French for The New York Times

The richer and poorer axis on the charts reflects an index of socioeconomic status. It includes median family income; the percent of adults with a bachelor's degree or higher; the poverty rate; the unemployment rate; the SNAP eligibility rate; and the percent of families headed by a single parent in a district. The data for each district includes charter schools located in its area.

Source: [Stanford Education Data Archive](#)

---Courier News--- 12/8/17

Process divides school board

BY RAFAEL GUERRERO

School District U46 board members are divided over whether self-evaluations should be done in a public forum or behind closed doors.

Board members Phil Costello and Jeanette Ward are pushing for discussions to be held in open session so residents are not left in the dark about what is said. Ward even threatened to boycott the meeting if it's not done in the open.

"I think there's tremendous value in having an open discussion in front of a public who sees us twice a month, and I think that's a very important, transparent tool," Costello said at Monday's board meeting.

While the board did not conduct a self-evaluation last year, previous discussions have been held privately.

Board President Donna Smith, speaking after the meeting, said such evaluations can be held in closed session per the Illinois Open Meetings Act as long as a representative of the Illinois Association of School Boards attends.

Board member Traci O'Neal Ellis said holding the evaluations without public attendance would allow members greater freedom to speak candidly.

But Ward said she fears such freedom would lead to "inappropriate" discussions, a suggestion that caused some board members to take offense.

"You are automatically assuming that we are going to have inappropriate discussions," added Melissa Owens, the newest board member and the only one to have not participated in the evaluation process. "I'm open to doing this however it helps the board, and that's disappointing to hear."

Ward also said she puts little stock in the process.

"I don't see a lot of value in the self-evaluation anyway, and if it's closed, I will not be attending," she said.

Owens and board member Sue Kerr said they are open to either option.

"I think we could get more out of it if it were closed, but I could live with open," Kerr said. "I realize we wouldn't discuss the same things in open probably."

The board will discuss the issue again when it considers potential dates for the evaluation and decides whether it should be held in one session or two.

---Courier News--- 12/8/17

U46 Oks \$273M levy, small tax hike

BY RAFAEL GUERRERO

School District U46 board members have approved a 2017 tax levy that's about 3 percent higher than last year and will result in a small tax increase for most property owners.

The \$272.8 million levy was approved at Monday's school board meeting and will provide more than half of the money needed for the district's operating budget of more than \$500 million.

According to the tax levy certificate, close to \$164 million collected from property taxes will be allocated for educational purposes, more than \$34 million for operations and maintenance, \$33 million for special education, and \$17 million for transportation purposes, among others.

For the owner of an average home on the Kane County side of Elgin, the U46 portion of his property tax bill will increase about \$45, according to a district analysis.

The district also includes portions of Cook and DuPage counties.

Board members said they were not happy about increasing the levy, but as member Sue Kerr said, the district is still trying to restore programs and initiatives lost in previous budget cuts needed a decade ago.

Board member Melissa Owens went further, saying the district was still playing catch up to early 2000s cuts. She recalled how her stepson was able to play football in middle school, and kindergarten students had art and music programs.

"Our families and students are asking us for services that we should be giving," Owens said.

U46 still lags behind the state average in per-student spending, some board members said. According to state report card data, U46 spent about \$1,000 less per student in instruction than the state average of \$7,853 in 2016.

Board members Jeanette Ward and Phil Costello voted against the tax levy increase.

Costello said he doubted that the increase would balance the budget given that the district plans for about \$518 million in expenditures but will take in only \$509 million in revenue.

Ward said she thinks tax increases are part of the reason for declining enrollment in U46.

"As I've said previously, in light of forecasted enrollment declines of two percent per year over the next three years, I disagree with increasing total spending, on which this levy relies," she said.

Owens countered Ward's argument. "So we shouldn't fight for the people who are actually moving in?"

The board must file the levy with Cook, Kane and DuPage counties by the last Tuesday in December.

SPORTS SECTION

---Courier News--- 12/8/17

Boys Basketball: Noah's arc

BY PAUL JOHNSON



South Elgin's Noah Rohr scored a career-high 24 points during Saturday's win over Rockford Guilford as the Storm remained unbeaten. (Sean King/Courier-News)

A good shooter in a slump needs to have a short memory. South Elgin senior Noah Rohr joined the club Saturday.

The smooth-shooting small forward poured in a career-high 24 points in a win over Rockford Guilford to keep the Storm unbeaten going into Upstate Eight Valley play.

"You just have to believe you're going to make the next shot and keep it going," Rohr said. "It was cool to get the career high, but at the end of the day, we got the win, so that's all that really matters."

South Elgin coach Brett Johnson could tell early on that Rohr's two-game shooting slump was history.

"The first shot went in, and I knew he was going to be on," Johnson said. "He found his openings every time, and he made his shots. I told him, 'Just keep shooting, Noah, you're going to make your shots,' and he did. That's what I want to see out of him."

South Elgin overcame spotty shooting performances from Rohr in the final two games of the Sycamore Strombom Thanksgiving Tournament. The Storm (5-0) have since put their balance on display. Saturday was Rohr's time to shine. Vince Miskiewicz led in scoring as South Elgin won the season opener over Hampshire. Drake Montgomery stepped up against Sycamore as the Storm reached the tournament title game. Miskiewicz, Montgomery and Jace Warrick then teamed up to beat Burlington Central for the championship. Seniors David Binion and Chris Hankins could be the next ones to break out.

“It’s nice to have six guys who can score 10 a game,” Johnson said. “One guy goes off, and we’re looking at 70 or 80 points, and that’s what we’re after. We want to score. Scoring makes the game fun.”

Rohr has seen the difference playing with a diverse group of scorers. The Storm have multiple options from the outside and several long, lanky athletes, making it tough on the opposition.

“It just opens up shots for everybody,” Rohr said. “It just spreads the floor so they can’t just focus on one guy because we have a lot of different people who can score the ball.”

The Storm’s success could come as a surprise. West Aurora always enters the conference race with a ton of hype. Bartlett earned some buzz after a strong season. South Elgin may have caught people by surprise, however.

“It kind of bothers us that we’re not being noticed,” Binion said. “We know eventually we’ll be up there. We don’t necessarily have to be noticed to be at the top.”

Having a full offseason with Johnson, who was hired just before the start of last season, helps.

“It’s a good start for the boys. I’m proud of them,” Johnson said. “It’s still early, there’s still a lot of work to be done, but it’s always nice to start this way. It keeps the morale exciting and fun.”

Paul Johnson is a freelance reporter for The Courier-News.

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Boys Basketball: Center holds court for Larkin in rivalry win

BY PAUL JOHNSON



Larkin’s Jalen Shaw, who had 15 points, 15 rebounds and seven blocked shots, swats away the shot of Elgin’s Xavier Bonds on Tuesday. (Brian O’Mahoney/Courier-News)

Having a presence like Jalen Shaw can mask many deficiencies on the court.

The 6-foot-10 Shaw led Larkin to a 51-43 Upstate Eight River win at rival Elgin, and the Royals needed all of his contributions Tuesday.

The senior center had 15 points, 15 rebounds and seven blocked shots, and it's a good thing that he did.

The Royals (4-2, 2-0) shot only 33.3 percent (17-for-51) from the floor, including 1-for-14 from 3-point range. They also had 22 turnovers but ended up holding off the Maroons (1-4, 0-2).

"I have to be a person who gets the team up and hyped in case things go bad," Shaw said. "I can't be doing badly. I just have to play how I play."

Despite the win, Larkin coach Deryn Carter was blunt in regards to his team's performance.

"Just off the sideline, grading any of our guys that played well, the list probably starts and ends with him," Carter said of Shaw. "We're just not playing well. It's disappointing. We should be better."

"As a coaching staff, whether it's lineup adjustments, whether it's practice changes, whether it's scout stuff, it's just not good enough."

The Royals have Shaw, though.

Offensively, he did most of his damage from the free-throw line, shooting 9-for-11 while facing constant double- and triple-teams. Defensively, however, he made his presence known.

Elgin shot a woeful 24.6 percent (14-for-57), with the threat of guarding the basket constantly on the Maroons' minds.

"We made some decisions getting too deep into the lane and letting Shaw affect us mentally," Elgin coach Mike Sitter said. "That got into people's heads, and he can do that. He's very skilled at that. That was kind of the difference in the game."

"I had one of those guys last year (Courtese Cooper) who did that, so I know the feeling of sitting there and watching him do those things."

Larkin seemingly wrapped up the game at the start of the fourth quarter. Shaw's dunk punctuated a 12-2 spurt that gave the Royals a 44-28 lead. Elgin, however, made things interesting.

Anthony Lynch scored 11 points for Larkin. Sophomore Xavier Bonds led Elgin with 10 points off the bench.

"This is the third of our wins that we should have finished up 20," Carter said. "Although it's still a win, those lapses will get you beat in close games. Always happy to beat Elgin, but very disappointed in where we are as a team right now."

After a rocky start to the season, Sitter said, he was pleased with his team's energy, if not the result.

"The effort was there," Sitter said. "We flew all over the court. We had a good game plan. They were coachable, and they played their hearts out. We just couldn't hit water if we fell out of a boat."

Although he realizes the Royals have been disappointing at times, Shaw said he felt an upswing is on the horizon.

"We're going to click soon, trust me," he said.

---Daily Herald--- 12/8/17

Girls Basketball: Batavia pulls away from Streamwood

BY JOHN LEMON

Batavia headed to halftime Thursday night at Streamwood in a tie game, confident things would improve in the second half.

That they did. Five different players scored in a 13-0 run to end the third quarter.

Batavia shot 56.5 percent from the field in the second half on its way to a 54-41 victory.

"At halftime we didn't feel that bad," Batavia coach Kevin Jensen said. "We just hadn't got a good flow going."

Batavia (6-3, 3-0 in the Upstate Eight Conference River) won its fourth straight game and sixth in the last seven.

Ava Sergio and Erin Golden both scored 14 points.

"We really tried to focus on getting the ball in the post because we had the height advantage and I could kick it out to our shooters," Sergio said. "We have a smaller team but we're all skilled players and we work together great."

With starting point guard Alison Newberry sidelined with a knee injury and Golden and Geddy Rerko in foul trouble in the first half, the Bulldogs struggled. They turned the ball over 7 times in the first quarter, which ended tied at 10.

Streamwood (1-9, 1-2) led 18-16 late in the second quarter until Paris Chaney sank a baseline jumper just before the buzzer.

The Sabres took their final lead at 26-25 midway through the third quarter on Mandy Mien's 3-point shot. Sergio, who hit 6 of her 8 free throws, converted a pair to put Batavia up 27-26 -- the start of a 17-1 run to end the quarter with the Bulldogs up 42-27.

That stretch featured a Katherine Polick layup, Rerko's 3, Golden's basket inside, a Rerko putback, Chaney's bucket and a jumper from freshman Morgan Haug. Streamwood, after just 5 turnovers in the first half, had 8 in the third quarter.

"I thought we should have had a lead at the half," Streamwood coach George Rosner said. "I was a little worried with that."

"They picked up their defense, we didn't handle it well. They were making shots and we were turning it over."

The Sabres scored the first seven points of the fourth quarter to pull within 42-34 on Andrea Bracy's 2 free throws. Bracy scored again moments later to make it 44-36 but Streamwood didn't get any closer.

Rerko added 10 points for Batavia, who won the rebound battle 32-24 led by Golden's 10 boards.

"It was a tough matchup for us inside because we don't have much size," Rosner said.

Bracy scored 15 points for the Sabres and Mien had 14. Maddi Exline, a 4-year starter, played in her first game of the year in her return from a hip injury and scored 2 points off the bench.