

## Press Clippings 8/17/2018

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### **Data: Elgin-area kids not ready for school**

New survey shows 90% of kindergartners in District U-46 last year were not prepared

BY RAFAEL GUERRERO

Ninety percent of the children attending kindergarten in School District U46 last year were not ready to be in school based on their emotional or social behavior or their academic skills, a new state survey shows.

The 2017 data released this week was compiled from the results of the Kindergarten Individual Development Survey, an observational measurement tool used by kindergarten teachers to evaluate students' school readiness using 55 academic measures.

Other Fox Valley school districts fared marginally better — 31 percent of District 300 students, 19 percent of St. Charles School District 303 students and 20 percent of West Aurora School District 129 students were found to be ready when tested in the three categories of social and emotional development, language and literacy development, and math.

Survey results showed only 6 percent of East Aurora School District 131 kindergarten students were ready for school in all three categories.

By comparison, an average of 24 percent of students statewide rated as ready in all categories.

When broken down, 49 percent were socially and emotionally ready, 44 percent were ready in language and literacy skills, and 30 percent had the necessary math skills.

Teachers observed and documented their kindergarten students during the first 40 days of school in 2017 to compile the data submitted to the state.

According to the Illinois State Board of Education, teachers were to determine how the students were doing in social interaction with peers and adults, playtime, letter and word knowledge, communication and conversation skills, number and shape recognition, and other criteria.

The survey showed that 36 percent of U46 kindergarten students were ready at the start of fall 2017 in terms of social and emotional development, 28 percent were ready in language and literacy development, and 16 percent were ready in math.

Unlike many other school districts, U46 has accumulated two years of kindergarten readiness data because it participated in the state's pilot program before it was rolled out for all students.

The positive news is the information shows students improved in all three categories as the year progressed, early learning director Peggy Ondera told school board members when preliminary information was discussed in July.

The district, however, presented the data differently than the state did, and its benchmarks showed a higher percentage of students meeting or exceeding readiness.

District spokeswoman Mary Fergus said the district planned to evaluate the state's survey results and its scoring process.

In East Aurora School District 131, 27 percent of kindergartners were ready in social and emotional development, 14 percent in language and literacy development, and 9 percent in math, state data for 2017 showed.

Almost three-quarters of the students did not demonstrate readiness in any of the three categories.

Neighboring West Aurora School District 129 reported better readiness numbers but still had a large percentages of students entering unprepared or at a disadvantage. Fifty percent of its kindergarten students demonstrated readiness in social and emotional development, 47 percent were ready in language and literacy development, and 24 percent were ready in math.

School District 300 in the Algonquin/Carpentersville area had some of the better readiness figures in the area. Fifty-five percent of students came in ready in terms of social and emotional development, 50 percent were ready in language and literacy, and 40 percent demonstrated readiness in the math measures.

St. Charles schools reported 48 percent of students were ready socially and emotionally, 43 percent were ready in language and literacy, and 27 percent were ready in math.

The data also looked at whether income status played a role in whether a kindergartner was ready for school. For the most part, local results were in line with statewide data: students who qualified for free or reduced-price lunch were more likely to come in unprepared versus students who did not need subsidized or free meals.

St. Charles proved an exception in that regard, with 21 percent of its kindergartners who qualified for free or reduced-price lunch demonstrating readiness in all three categories, compared with 19 percent of nonqualifying students, data showed.

The state board is looking at kindergarten data to better gauge students' long-term academic success rates. Research suggests children with higher levels of school readiness at age 5 are more likely to succeed in school, are less likely to drop out during high school and will earn more when they enter the job market, the agency says.

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## **First-graders give sage advice**

New survey shows 90% of kindergartners in District U-46 last year were not prepared

BY RAFAEL GUERRERO

Just two days into the new school year and Clinton Elementary School's first-graders already have wisdom to share.

Some of the 23 students in Krista Jones' first-grade classroom had memories of their kindergarten days — adjusting to a school schedule, meeting new people, learning new subjects — and offered their best advice to the new crop of kindergartners just getting their feet wet.

Alayah Nolan

Science was her favorite subject last year, the South Elgin girl said. "It's exciting to learn about the animals," Alayah said.

That said, Alayah understood her younger schoolmates might be nervous or scared during their first few days in school.

"It's OK, you'll be fine. All the teachers are really nice," she said.

Nathaniel Cortez

One of the few students in Jones' classroom not to have attended kindergarten at Clinton, Nathaniel attended Washington Elementary in Elgin last year.

"I had never gone to school before, and I missed my mom," he said, recalling his first day of school.

Nathaniel's advice: Don't worry, listen to your teachers and keep quiet when teachers are speaking. After all, there are many things to like about kindergarten.

"I liked the stories (our teacher read us). I liked recess," he said. He was also a fan of free-choice time, where the kids could play.

"All people like playing," he said.

Patrick Tapins

Patrick also loved free-choice time. The South Elgin boy also enjoyed playing with blocks because he could design and build new structures.

When asked what tips or advice he could give a student younger than himself, Patrick said, "When you have a question, please raise your hand. Otherwise, you get in trouble."

His memory of the first day? "I was really excited but also a little nervous," he said.

Kaylee Eggert

Most of the students cited recess and free-choice time as their favorite parts of kindergarten, but not Kaylee.

Math was her favorite subject last year, she said. When asked why kindergartners should love it too, she said, “because it’s fun.”

Another piece of advice from Kaylee: Be nice to the teachers.

Dominick Gapastione

This 6-year-old had a companion when he headed to his first day of school: his twin brother, Niko.

That didn’t stop Dominick from feeling “a little bit scared last year because we were meeting new friends, new people.” He ended up playing and making friends with classmates, so it ended up being just fine, he said.

“Be ready to learn and learn about a ton of new stuff,” Dominick advised incoming kindergartners.

Krista Jones (first-grade teacher)

Jones not only is an 11-year teaching veteran but also a U46 grad, having attended district school from age 5 through 18, she said.

Her memories of kindergarten are a little vague, but she can relate to what her students are feeling, she said.

“We felt the same way once,” Jones said. “I woke up that day, I was a little sad because summer was over. ... We all have those first-day feelings.”

Jones said the youngest students should ask for help from their teachers, and she believes her new first-graders are going to do just fine — maybe because they were the first to go through the district’s full-day kindergarten program last year.

“Impressively, I think they are learning the routine more quickly,” she said. “I just want them to have fun, be a listener, be ready for all the challenges. Always try hard.”

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## **New U46 school year begins as students return to class**

BY RAFAEL GUERRERO

More than 39,000 students attending District U46 schools were back in class Wednesday.

The new school year brings new initiatives, including the expansion of the district’s take-home computer rollout, the introduction of dual-language classes in the high schools and the return of counselors to the middle schools.

U46 CEO Tony Sanders welcomed staff, families and others to the 2018-19 school year in a short video posted online.

In it, he mentions some of the more noticeable changes. Chromebook computers will be distributed to all 12,000 high school students, devices students will work with in school and be able to take home during the year. Several hundred middle school students also will receive Chromebooks this school year if they enrolled in certain math courses.

The district's dual-language expansion finally expands into the high schools, Sanders said. Over the past few years, dual-language programs expanded from the elementary schools into the middle schools, completing the middle school rollout last school year. The high school program will be limited freshman classes this school year.

Sanders thanked state lawmakers for the additional funds school districts are receiving this year, allowing the return of middle school counselors after years of schools having to do without one.

Additional administrative support will be added at some high-enrollment elementary and middle schools this year in the form of assistant principals, Sanders said.

"I think the investments in public education in our system, what you're seeing this year, is just the first step," Sanders said.

The first semester of the 2018-19 school year ends Dec. 21, followed by a two-week winter break. The last day of the school year is May 22, should no emergency days be used. High school graduations are scheduled for May 25 at the Sears Centre in Hoffman Estates.

## SPORTS SECTION

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**A for Azxavier**

### **Salinas looks to lead South Elgin at quarterback, all over the field**

BY PAUL JOHNSON

As a freshman, South Elgin senior Azxavier Salinas started his high school career at quarterback.

Salinas transitioned to wide receiver the past two seasons. He's the top returnee at that position for the Storm after catching 17 passes for 201 yards and two touchdowns last year.

But Salinas has been working under center during the summer. He's in a battle with fellow senior Jakob Johnson to replace Nate Gomez, last year's Upstate Eight Valley Player of the Year.

"It was a little bit of a slow transition, but with coach (Dragan) Teonic leading me and teaching me how to run this new offense, it's been good," Salinas said. "He's been helping me a lot.

"We're just improving every day. (Johnson and I) are both fighting for the position. Coach is doing a good job of using both of us at quarterback."

Teonic, who's in his first season at South Elgin after a four-year run at Larkin, knows even if Salinas isn't the full-time quarterback, the Storm can use him in several places to make an impact.

"He is a special, special kid," Teonic said of Salinas. "He's smart. He's tough. He's a football player. He can play a multitude of positions. We're trying him out at quarterback, working him in the slot.

"He'll play corner for us. He'll play special teams. He can punt. He just does it all. It's awesome having a guy like that."

No matter who's under center at 1:30 p.m. Aug. 25 against West Chicago, Teonic wants to make sure his quarterback doesn't play with the pressure of having to replace the dynamic Gomez.

"That's not even fair," Teonic said. "Nate was a special, special athlete, no question. These guys are good in their own ways. They have their own strengths and weaknesses."

Salinas was one of the key leaders who helped bring Teonic into the fold. Teonic was hired 2 1/2 weeks into summer camp, so it's been a crash course in learning a new system and coaching style.

"He's the best person to coach us right now," Salinas said. "I love coach Teonic. He's a great coach and an even better person. I think it's a great spot. I like where we're going.

"The transition was slow at first, but once coach got into it, it was full go. He's the right person for the job."

South Elgin (8-2) is coming off a UEC Valley title and a first-round playoff loss to Palatine. Teonic is quick to point out that group is gone.

The Storm has just 16 seniors, including two kickers, and a new head coach.

"We're not inheriting last year's conference champs," Teonic said. "We're building it back up. We're going to start three sophomores on varsity. We're going to start three seniors on each side of the ball.

"You talk about being young, but it's awesome at the same time."

The Storm jump right into Upstate Eight play as the conference switches to a 10-team single division.

"I love it, totally love it," Teonic said. "When I was at Larkin before I was here, I was part of the change and I was a big, big proponent of it.

"Now you're going to have a true conference champion. This is a straight-up battle."

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