

# Press Clippings - August 7, 2023

## - Elgin Courier News

### Taking inspiration from her own mother's story, new U-46 superintendent's ready to listen and learn

By: Mike Danahey  
August 04, 2023



A lesson learned from her own mother's grade school experience has stuck with new District U-46 Superintendent Suzanne Johnson: "Make sure every parent feels welcome." (School District U-46/HANDOUT)

School District U-46 Superintendent Suzanne Johnson never forgot something her mother told her back when she had just been named principal of Bartlett High School.

It came from her mother's own experience, and it's inspired her approach to the job ever since, she said.

As the story goes, when Johnson's mother was a child in grade school, she was having trouble with math. Her teacher was dismissive and seemed prejudiced against girls, she said. But when she asked her mother — Johnson's grandmother — to speak to the teacher on her behalf, she refused.

"I was devastated when I heard this," Johnson said. "My grandmother was the one who gave me confidence when I was growing up, but she felt uncomfortable going to talk to the

teacher.”

The lesson was simple: “Make sure every parent feels welcome,” Johnson said.

As she heads into her first year as the superintendent of the state’s largest school district outside of Chicago, it’s something she’ll be practicing with every parent she meets, she said.

“We want every day to be a great day to learn,” she said, and parents play an integral role in that.

You also accomplish it by establishing a sense of connection among students, engaging them as they learn, making them aware of extracurricular activities, and encouraging interaction with teachers and other students, Johnson said.

It also means being aware of mental health, housing and other issues students might be experiencing outside of the classroom.



Suzanne Johnson, new superintendent of School District U-46, is an alumni of U-46 schools, the daughter of U-46 school educators and a U-46 employee for her entire 26-year career. (School District U-46/HANDOUT)

A self-described “second-generation (Elgin High School) Maroon,” Johnson comes to the job as an alumni of U-46 schools, the daughter of two U-46 school educators and an

employee of the U-46 school district for her entire 26-year career.

Her first job was teaching language arts at Canton Middle School in Streamwood. She rose through the administrative ranks at Bartlett High School before making the transition to districtwide administration, first as assistant superintendent of teaching and learning and then as deputy superintendent.

She holds a doctorate in curriculum and instruction from the University of Illinois-Chicago.

Johnson was named interim superintendent in February following the departure of Tony Sanders, who left to become state superintendent of education. She started her new job July 1.

Johnson said she keeps in touch with Sanders, whom she considers a friend as well as a colleague.

“The advice he gave me was to make the job my own,” she said.

It’s an exciting time to be at the helm, she said, noting that voters resoundingly supported selling \$179 million in school building bonds to help pay for a huge overhaul of the district’s school buildings and facilities.

With the momentum that’s created, “we have to be stewards of that energy,” Johnson said.

The improvements come at a time when the district also is rolling out its U-46 Rising Schools of Rigor and Equity initiative, which will eventually be used at all schools. The approach stresses team learning and problem solving, with teachers taking on the role of coaches.

“Education is a team sport,” Johnson said. “I appreciate the support I’ve received from staff and the board of education.”

But even with all she has on her plate, the new school year will begin Aug. 15 for her family just as it does for everyone else’s in the district, she said.

“We’ll be getting our two boys ready and sending them off to a U-46 school,” Johnson said.

## **- The Daily Herald**

### **Elgin-area barbershops offer free back-to-school**

# haircuts for students in need

**By: Madhu Krishnamurthy**

**August 07, 2023**



Wilbur Dumas, Jr. cuts the hair of a young customer last year at Lincoln Avenue Barbershop in Elgin. Dumas' shop and other Elgin-area local barbershops will provide free back-to-school haircuts to students in need on Sunday. *Courtesy of Wilbur Dumas*

Several Elgin-area barbershops again are partnering with the Boys and Girls Club of Elgin to offer free back-to-school haircuts for students in need.

Haircuts and hairdos will be offered from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. (2 p.m. for the last walk-in) Sunday at the Boys and Girls Club of Elgin, 355 Dundee Ave. It is open to students from kindergarten through 12th grade. There also will be informational booths from community partners, activities for families, and food and beverages.

Participating businesses include Sauvage Barber Parlor in South Elgin, Fade Stars Barbershop in Elgin, In The Cut Hair Studios in Elgin, Tapered Edges in West Dundee, VBeauty XO in Elgin, Stay Sharp Cuts & Shaves in Elgin, the Cosmetology & Spa Academy and Tricoci University of Beauty Culture, both Elgin campuses.

"I'm very thankful for all the community partners, local barbershops, salons and barbers schools coming together to help this event come to light," said Wilbur Dumas Jr., owner of Lincoln Avenue Barbershop in Elgin and a product of the Boys and Girls Club of Elgin and graduate of **Larkin High School** in Elgin. "It's our duty to give back to the community and send our youth back to school with that 'can-do' attitude. My motto is, you look good, you feel good."

Elgin City Council member Corey Dixon, the Windy City Bulls and DeeJayRoby entertainment company are event partners.

"I'm happy to be leading this service to the community with community partners, Lincoln Avenue Barbershop and the Boys and Girls Club of Elgin," Dixon said. "Without great people such as them, this isn't possible."