

Press Clippings - 2/27/2024

- Daily Herald -

From Elgin to historically Black colleges: U-46 seeks to cultivate college dreams

By: James Fuller

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Elgin Area School District U-46, is trying to expose students to college life by paying to take them on visits to campuses around the country.

When Teresa Lance took a look at the colleges that came to recruit Elgin Area Unit **District U-46** students, it was what she didn't see that left the most lasting impression.

And she worried it would have the same impression on the district's 2,100 Black students.

Lance, the district's assistant superintendent of equity and innovation, saw a lot of military recruiters and Illinois-based schools. They were all excellent options for students preparing to graduate from the district. And yet, there were no historically Black colleges represented.

Since at least 2017, the district's Illinois State Report Card data shows fewer U-46 students enroll in college than the state average. In some years, the district has trailed that average by as much as 6 percentage points.

It's rare for a college or university to see Black students account for the majority of its population.

In Illinois, Malcolm X, Richard Daley and Wright colleges are among the majority Hispanic post-secondary schools offering a nearby option for U-46's 19,700 Hispanic students who may seek out an environment where they can more immediately find fellow students they can relate to.

But of the 107 historically Black colleges and universities in the United States, none are in Illinois. That can make them feel out of reach.

To address that, U-46 schools began paying for the transportation, hotel and meal costs to send busloads of students to a dozen historically Black colleges and universities three years ago.

It started with the district's three Title I schools — a federal designation for schools with a high percentage of students from low-income households. It spread to a districtwide program last year. And then, in January, the U-46 school board unanimously approved a plan to spend \$114,000 to take the largest group of students yet on a tour of the schools this March.

Larkin High School Principal Krystal Bush went to a historically Black school and sent all four of her children to historically Black colleges and universities.

"Just seeing there were others there like them, it was a great experience for them," Bush said.

It wasn't a difficult task to get her to chaperone the trips. More difficult is one of the barriers to students actually attending college.

"It's the stigma of leaving home and the stigma of parents afraid to let go," Bush said. "People want to keep their babies close. But allowing them to go on these trips, that's the first step."

There is now a waiting list of students who want to go on the trip at Larkin and other district high schools. Bush has instituted a minimum GPA requirement for students who want to go on the trips, making the experience as aspirational as it is inspirational.

"It opened up our students' eyes," Bush said. "The traditions at HBCUs are valuable to our students."

Cost is another barrier to college. In addition to the cultural traditions of historically Black colleges, they also tend to be more affordable, even at out-of-state tuition rates.

For example, the most recent comparable data from the National Center for Education Statistics shows the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has an average in-state net price (after scholarships and financial aid) of \$14,544 per year. At Kentucky State University, a nearby HBCU, the net out-of-state price is \$11,473.

The early results of the U-46 tours are promising. Students from last year's tour put in applications at a dozen HBCUs. Lance said the district aims to increase that number, as well as seeing students accepted and attending the schools. Her interviews with the students who attended the tours also revealed an added benefit of feeling more at home even within U-46's own classrooms.

"Overwhelmingly, there was this increased sense of belonging," Lance said. "From the bus ride itself to building camaraderie when they are in the hotel and when they are touring the campuses and seeing adults that look like them. The students overwhelmingly spoke to the increased sense of belonging after having those experiences."

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South Elgin High cheer team to be honored with Accent on Achievement

By: Tara Burghart

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The South Elgin High School coed varsity cheer team took first place at the Illinois High School Association Cheerleading state finals.

Team won first place in state finals

The Elgin Area **School District U-46** board of education will honor the **South Elgin High School** coed varsity cheer team on Monday, Feb. 26, for being named champions at the Illinois High School Association cheerleading state finals.

The team, with 24 students from all grade levels, ranked first among 25 coed finalist groups in the state championships held in Bloomington on Feb. 2-3, 2024.

The other categories were small team, medium team, and large team. It's a repeat championship for South Elgin High School, which also won the coed division in 2020.

In celebration of their win, a gathering to welcome the team's bus home from the state tournament was held on the Sunday night they returned. The team was honored at halftime of the South Elgin High boys basketball game on Feb. 6.

There was also an all-school assembly to recognize the team and showcase the state trophy. Students and staff viewed the cheer team's winning routine on an overhead screen.

Head coach Savannah Bennett said the team members had a special bond, and all focused on how they could support their teammates.

"Cheerleading is a physically demanding sport, and they trained hard all season. When we mixed in the mentality work, it allowed us to practice and perform at a higher level," she said. "Seeing their months of hard work, dedication, and sacrifice pay off is something I will never forget. I hope when our athletes look back on this moment, they are proud of themselves for what they accomplished, together as a team."

The students being honored are: seniors Maya Jovanovic, Isabella Meloun and Katie Solis; juniors Kyra Clark, Taylor Davis, Bryan Estrada, Adriana Jimenez, Adelyn Logsdon, Bridget Lucas, Nevaeh Poole, Aubriunna Rosa, Emma Salazar, Morgan Stokes, Stewart Williams Jr., and Greta Zelaitis; sophomores Sophia Catania, Kaelyn Lindsay, Isabella Napoles, Kylie Rogowski, Stella Shah, Emma Marie Steinhofer, and Paige Vargas; and freshmen Kirsten Cones and Hunter Lindsay.

The team was coached by head coach Savannah Bennett and assistant coaches Kathryn Ciolli and Savannah Swayze.

The "Accent on Achievement" certificates will be presented to Bennett and the 24 students on the coed cheer team at 7 p.m. Monday, Feb. 26, in room 140 of the Educational Services Center.

The U-46 Board of Education meeting will also be streamed live on the district's YouTube channel and via Zoom.