

**– ABC-7 Chicago News –**

**2022 Illinois school report card shows highest graduation rate in a decade, chronic absenteeism**

**Oct. 27, 2022**

**Michelle Gallardo**

To view the full story, click [here](#)

This year's Illinois report card is out and it shows the highest graduation rate in a decade.

However, it also shows a glaring pandemic-related issue.

There were improved high school graduation rates across the board, but dramatically high levels of chronic absenteeism, particularly among Black and Brown students. Those are just two of the data points revealed by this year's Illinois school report card that was published Thursday.

"Despite all the challenges, Illinois is defying expectations with so many positive developments," Governor JB Pritzker said.

While choosing to focus on the positives, Gov. Pritzker and the state superintendent for education, Dr. Camen Ayala, acknowledged some glaring issues. Namely, while students in all demographics have shown learning growth that brings them back to 2019 pre-pandemic levels, proficiency rates in math and English language arts have declined significantly, particularly among Black and Latino students.

Dr. Ayala said growth is a more important indicator level than proficiency, which is boiled down to a passing or failing grade.

"It doesn't say that I'm a third grader and I came in reading at a first-grade level, right? And what the growth is telling me is now I'm reading on grade level, but my proficiency level is still at this point," Dr. Ayala explained.

With 37,000 mostly minority students, **Elgin's School District U-46** is the second largest in the state. Officials there acknowledge the situation as schools emerge from the pandemic is far from rosy.

"When we returned to in-person learning, predominantly, it was our white and Asian middle and upper-class families who returned for in-person instruction. And our lower income, predominantly Black and Latino students whose families chose to keep them at home for fear," said **Dr. Tony Sanders, the superintendent for School District U-46.**

**Dr. Sanders** said what is particularly problematic are the levels of chronic absenteeism, which over the last four years has grown statewide from 16.8% to 29.8%. Among minority students, that number is much higher with 47.9% of Black students and 36.1% of Latino students were chronically absent last year.

"Parents were also conditioned during COVID that it's OK to keep the kid home. So certainly, we want students staying home if they're ill, but otherwise, we have to create the conditions for them to come to school every day," **Dr. Sanders** said.

Those conditions include addressing students' social and emotional needs so that they want to be in school again, educators said. But they also said this won't be a one or two-year fix. Some fear that the pandemic had a generational impact with consequences that will continue to be felt for years to come.

To see your school's grade, visit [illinoisreportcard.com](https://illinoisreportcard.com).

## — The Courier-News —

Oct. 28, 2022

Patrick McGavin - For Naperville Sun

**Omar comin'**

**Facilitator Saldana scores goal as **Elgin** moves on to sectional final against **Larkin****



**Elgin's** Omar Saldana drives through Dundee-Crown defenders Miguel Pena, left, and Cristian Lechuga during a Class 3A Hampshire Sectional semifinal game on Wednesday. H. Rick Bamman/Beacon-News

Elgin's Omar Saldana is the kind of malleable player every great team requires.

The senior midfielder fits his versatile game to the available situation.

"Everybody has their own talent or special skill," he said. "Controlling the game and being a leader is what I am best at. That is what I always try to do when I am out there."

**Elgin's** top facilitator, Saldana also knows how to score when the opportunity arises.

Saldana showed all facets of his game Wednesday as the Maroons maintained their torrid level of play with a 2-0 win over Dundee-Crown in a Class 3A Hampshire Sectional semifinal.

The night belonged to Saldana, who had a goal and an assist as **Elgin** (19-0-3) won its fourth straight game. The Maroons have a 58-5 goal differential in that streak.

"Our attack throughout the season has always been great," Saldana said. "I think the difference now is that we are really bonding as a team."

"We're very good at keeping possession and we're breaking teams down."

**Elgin** advanced to play at 5 p.m. Friday in the sectional final against **Larkin** (16-8), a 2-1 overtime winner over Jacobs. Anthony Cordova and Atlai Gutierrez scored for the **Royals**.

For the **Maroons**, Saldana's goal in the first half Wednesday off an assist by senior forward Miguel Navarro built a 1-0 halftime lead.

"Our ability to create the high pressure just gives us a lot more opportunities," Saldana said after scoring his seventh goal of the season. "We never give teams time to set up."

In the 45th minute, junior forward Eduardo Nava scored on a header for his team-best 23rd goal. Saldana delivered the perfect service for his team-leading 17th assist.

"The more chemistry we have, the more everything's coming together," Saldana said. "Nobody can hold Nava down."

Nava sustained a pattern that has marked an undefeated season for the **Maroons**.

"The majority of our goals have come in the first five minutes of a half," Nava said. "Why is that? Everybody is always pushing up."

Nava scored five goals in the Maroons' first two games, creating momentum the Maroons have turned into a dream season.

The creativity and pressure he creates off movement puts the opposition under a constant state of duress.

“We know what we like to do and how to play, working off the long balls or the set pieces,” Nava said. “And guys looking to find me high has been great.”

For a team that has not been on the wrong side of the scoreboard the entire season, Nava confirmed that winning is now an expectation.

“I’d be surprised if another team beats us this year,” he said. “Moving forward, I think we are going to do well. We don’t get distracted and we don’t worry whether it’s a semifinal or final.”

Senior forwards Miguel Pena and Alex Martinez created solid chances for Dundee-Crown (13-9-4) in defeat, but the **Maroons** always had the answer.

Senior goalkeeper Kleber Rodriguez made five saves in posting his 13th shutout for **Elgin**. He has allowed just eight goals in 1,566 minutes for a scintillating 0.41 goals-against average.

“Even though this is my first year playing varsity, I have played with all the guys on our back on various club teams,” Rodriguez said. “We know how to play together.

“I like coming off the line and being aggressive. Playing that style when you are the goalie is really good because you are going to intimidate the other team.”

And this **Elgin** team, at this time, believes that winning is contagious.

“We have been playing together since the summer,” Saldana said. “We knew the talent we had, and it was just a matter of putting the pieces together.”

## — The Daily Herald —

### Five games to watch as opening round of high school playoffs begin

**Oct. 27, 2022**

**By John Lemon**

Here are five games to keep an eye on when the high school football playoffs kick off Friday night.

No. 20 Bolingbrook (7-2) at No. 13 Maine South (7-2)

This Class 8A matchup features two programs with rich traditions. Maine South reached the Class 8A title game last year; Bolingbrook averages over 42 points a game with Northwestern-commit safety Damon Walters leading its defense. Undefeated South Elgin could await the winner.

No. 25 Stevenson (6-3) at 8 Warren (8-1)

Also in 8A, we've got a North Suburban Conference rematch. Warren won the first meeting 36-16, but the Patriots have been on fire since with five straight wins. Patriots QB Matt Projansky has thrown for 1,388 yards and 12 touchdowns; Warren running back Charley Thompson has rushed for 1,148 yards and 12 touchdowns.

No. 19 Naperville Central (6-3) at No. 14 Lyons Township (7-2)

The seeds are close, the records are close, and this 8A game figures to be close between teams from two strong football conferences -- the DuPage Valley and West Suburban Silver, respectively. Both teams are strong defensively, with Maverick Ohle (8.5 sacks), Ryan Spickermann (50 tackles) and Jack LeCrone (70 tackles) among the Redhawks to watch while Daniel Nussbaum has given the team a lift filling in for the injured Charlie Eagan. The Redhawks' neighbor, Naperville North (7-2), also have a challenging first round game against Marist who played 7 playoff teams this year including Glenbard West, Mt. Carmel and Loyola.

No. 24 Brother Rice (5-4) at No. 9 Jacobs (8-1)

In Class 7A, Jacobs -- who shared the Fox Valley title with Huntley and Prairie Ridge -- takes on a Brother Rice team has made the semifinals the last three playoffs. Jacobs RB Antonio Brown has 1,677 rushing yards with 21 touchdowns. If Jacobs wins, it could have quite a road trip next weekend to No. 8 Collinsville.

No. 20 Hoffman Estates (6-3) at No. 13 Elk Grove (7-2)

These Class 7A MSL teams played in Week 2 with the Grenadiers winning 24-14, part of a turnaround season that culminated with their first playoff berth since 2013. Quarterbacks Aiden Cyr and Mitch Janczak make their respective teams go.

## – The Daily Herald –

### Scouting Fox opening round playoff football games

**Oct. 27, 2022**

**By Mike Miazga**

**Larkin** (6-3) at Lake Zurich (8-1)

When: Friday, 7 p.m.

Seeds: **Larkin** No. 22; Lake Zurich No. 11 in the 32-team Class 7A bracket.

About the **Royals**: **Larkin** is in the playoffs for a second year in a row under coach Grant Dietz. "We are excited with the positive buzz surrounding **Larkin** football," he said. "Alumni and the community are active in their support. We have come a long way in a short time, but there is still a lot of work left to be done." Dietz pointed out Lake Zurich's only loss is to St. Charles North, whose only loss is to Palatine, which finished 8-1 as well. "This time of the year is exciting to break out of the usual teams you play and play someone else," Dietz said. "Zurich is well-coached and they play hard. They have weapons on offense and play very well on defense. They will be a tough challenge." Dietz said the **Royals'** biggest steps will be continuing the process "that has got us to where we are currently," he said. "We finally have a full offseason under our belts and continue to get quality athletes in the program. Slowly, we are becoming more disciplined. I tell them you can't expect different results from doing the same thing. We are performing better in the classroom. The stat and accolades go with them are nice, but our goal is to prepare the young men to be better people to help themselves after their time with us is done. We have come a long way in a short time and we hope we can continue this ride. Football is back at **Larkin**." Junior running back Jalen Miller has rushed for 755 yards on 80 carries with 9 touchdowns. He also has 20 catches for 350 yards and 4 more receiving scores. Miller has 7 games this year with multiple touchdowns scored. "Jalen has stepped up and

played a vital role in the success we are having this year," Dietz said. "I do not normally have a junior as a captain, but his intangibles and quality leadership exemplifies **Larkin** Pride and he was chosen to be a captain this season. He has raised his level of play and subsequently raised the players around him, too. He runs angry. Senior running back-linebacker Chevy Clements has rushed for more than 700 yards and has 5 touchdowns. "He has played a vital role in our success," Dietz said. "He is a captain and provides leadership on and off the field. He plays in another gear." Senior linebacker and kicker Hector Flores (also a team captain) has 80 tackles and "is always around the ball," Dietz said. "He has stepped up and played well in our games since Week 4. We use him as a special teams weapon." Sophomores Kevin Malone (linebacker) and Robert Grant (defensive tackle) have played well on defense. "Kevin has played awesome this season," Dietz said. "He is a little undersized, but he makes up for it with heart. He plays bigger than he is and glad we have him for the next few years. Robert is a first-year varsity player and has played very well earning player of the week honors a couple weeks. He had an interception. He has quickly matured into a team leader. We are excited to have him for the next few years. Junior defensive back Michael Bresnen and sophomore defensive end Diyonnes King also have made big strides, Dietz noted. "Michael has been getting better each week with our defense. He has had to learn our new defense in a short time and become a leader this season," he said. "He has grown as a person. I am very proud of the job he has done this year. DK is an impressive sophomore who we are excited to have for the next few years. He has gotten better at defensive end each week. He has game-changing capabilities and a strong work ethic with a motor that doesn't stop."

About the Bears: The North Suburban Conference-champion Bears (first NSC since 2017 and fifth overall) are also in the playoffs for a second year in a row. "**Larkin** is an explosive, athletic team," Lake Zurich coach Ron Planz said. "Their team speed is very good. They hit a lot of big plays on offense and fly around on defense. We are going to need to be disciplined with great pursuit on defense to limit their big play. On offense, we have to make sure we take care of the ball and stay on our blocks. It is great to finally be healthy. We took a beating in the middle of the season with playing the top part of conference. It is also good to see that the guys look comfortable in all our schemes. Guys have accepted their roles and we keep getting better every week. "Ashton Gondeck has passed for 924 yards with 11 touchdowns against 2 picks. Chris Pirrone has 400 rushing yards and 6 TDs, while Gondeck has 380 rushing yards and 4

touchdowns. Tyler Erkman has 27 catches for 422 yards and 6 touchdowns, while Jackson Piggott has 22 catches for 351 yards and 3 scores. On defense, Lincoln Adams has 50 tackles and 2 forced fumbles, while Tyler Burkley has 50 tackles, 3 tackles for loss and 3 interceptions, while Calen Grabowski has 49 tackles, 2 sacks and 7 tackles for loss. Short snapper Nick Quiroz took over midway through the year after an injury. "Nick has done a great job with that," Planz said. Cason Gwisdala is the team's long snapper. "Cason has been great," Planz added. "Both those guys helped contribute to kicker Danny Vuckovic's great year."

Belleville East (5-4) at **South Elgin** (9-0)

When: Friday, 6 p.m.

Seeds: Belleville East No. 29; **South Elgin** No. 4 in Class 8A.

About the Lancers: Belleville East, out of the Southwestern Conference, is no stranger to the Chicago suburbs. The Lancers traveled to Metea Valley in Week 3 and scored a 52-19 win. This time, the Lancers will cover nearly 300 miles and 5 hours of driving time on their way to **South Elgin**. "**South Elgin** has been really successful over the past three or four seasons in terms of wins and losses," Belleville East coach Michael Harrison said. "They have a great offense with a dominant rushing attack and their starting quarterback is a rising junior and one of the better quarterbacks in the area. They are physical and their defense runs to the ball well. Their linebacker-running back No. 9 is physical and one of the better linebackers we have seen on film all year. To be successful against them, we have to contain their rushing attack and not give up big plays in the passing game. We will have to find a way to move the ball and score points." Senior captains Anthony Cunningham, Jayden Howard and OJ Mosley lead the way. "We have a great group of seniors led by our captains," Harrison said. "The guys have stayed together and stayed focused over the course of the season, focusing on each individual opponent. We've been able to bounce back from some tough losses to good teams." Howard, a linebacker, has 100 tackles, 9 tackles for loss, 3 sacks and a forced fumble. Cunningham, on the defensive line, has 25 tackles, 3 tackles for loss, 2 sacks and 2 forced fumbles, while line mate Mosley had 29 tackles, 6 tackles for loss, 2 sacks and has a defensive touchdown.

About the **Storm**: "We know Belleville East has had a good season and is turning their program around," **South Elgin** coach Dragan Teonic said. "They are well-coached and very athletic. They have several Division I players and have plenty of size and speed. We will be tested because our regular season can't prepare us for this level of football. We hope that being at home is an advantage for us and we need our crowd to be rocking Friday." Teonic has been thrilled with how his team has turned up the focus and intensity in its preparation of late. "Our team has improved our tackling and ball security steadily this season, and that's something we will need to do well moving forward," he said. Running back Jordan Green has 62 carries for 685 yards and 10 touchdowns while splitting time with junior running back Ari Kravis. Wide receiver Mason Montgomery has 38 carries for 505 yards and 8 touchdowns to go with 22 catches for 468 yards and 14 receiving touchdowns. Michael Tringali has 120 tackles and 7 sacks. Also of defensive note has been the play of senior linebacker Christian Tecza and senior defensive end Danny Viscuso. "Christian has been playing great football for us and has been a standout at middle linebacker alongside Michael Tringali," Teonic said. "Christian has great vision and a nose for the ball (44 tackles). Danny has been playing better every week. He came back to football after a two-year hiatus and has been a great addition to our team (29 tackles, 3 sacks and 2 hurries)." Teonic also had great things to say about **South Elgin's** special teams unit, which is led by special teams coordinator Chris Capps (also the **Storm's** defensive line coach). "Our kickoff team is playing at the highest level since we have been here (2018)," he said. "They are allowing only 15.1 yards per return and our punt team has averaged 35.4 yards per punt (**South Elgin** has punted only 10 times this season). And our defensive line has been one of our greatest strengths every season and coach Capps is the key to all of that."

To read the full article, click [here](#)