

Press Clippings 12/31/2021 to 1/4/2022

Daily Herald

Five U-46 schools will be closed Tuesday because of staffing shortages --- 1/4/2022

By Nicola Andrews, Daily Herald Correspondent



Long-term substitute Maria S. Morales teaches preschool at Huff Elementary School in Elgin, which is one of five U-46 schools that will be closed Tuesday because of a staffing shortage. *Brian Hill | Staff Photographer/Oct. 8, 2021*

Five schools in **Elgin Area Unit District 46** will be closed Tuesday because of staffing shortages related to COVID-19.

According to an email from Superintendent Tony Sanders, the schools are Highland Elementary and Huff Elementary in Elgin, Independence Early Learning Center in Bartlett, Parkwood Elementary in Hanover Park and Ridge Circle Elementary in Streamwood.

Teachers from those five schools who do not report being sick will work as substitutes at other schools in the district Tuesday, Sanders wrote, while other staff members, such as nurses or custodians, will be required to report to the school or take a day off, Sanders said.

U-46 encourages students who feel ill to stay home. All students who attend school in person are required to wear masks.

ABC-7 Eyewitness News

IL COVID: Some Elgin schools closed, other suburban schools go remote due to staffing shortages --- 1/3/2022

By ABC7 Chicago Digital Team

<https://abc7chicago.com/illinois-covid-elgin-school-closures-u-46-schools-lincoln-way/11422467/>

ELGIN, Ill. (WLS) -- School districts in the suburbs have been forced to close or return to remote learning thanks to COVID-induced staffing shortages.

School District U-46 in Elgin announced that five of its schools will be closed on Tuesday due to staffing shortages, while the rest of the district's students return to in-person learning. The five affected schools are:

- Highland Elementary
- Huff Elementary
- Independence Early Learning Center
- Parkwood Elementary
- Ridge Circle Elementary

U-46 Superintendent Tony Sanders said in a letter home to parents the district will continue to review staffing levels on a day-by-day basis to determine when these schools can reopen and whether other schools may need to close in the coming days and weeks.

Lincoln-Way District 210 announced Monday that all of its schools will return to remote learning through the end of the week due to staffing shortages.

The district said it will implement its emergency e-learning plan outlined on its website, including live instruction delivered through the district's web portal. Students who cannot participate in remote learning will need their parents to call the attendance hotline to report an absence.

School buildings were open Monday to let students in to get any supplies they need

from their lockers.

Lincoln-Way said they would continue to monitor the need for remote learning and inform parents of any changes as soon as possible.

West Chicago District 33 also announced its students would go to remote learning until Friday thanks to staffing shortages due to COVID cases. Parents were notified last week when it became clear that at least 75 of the district's 750 workers, which includes teachers and support staff, would be absent this week from the virus or for other reasons.

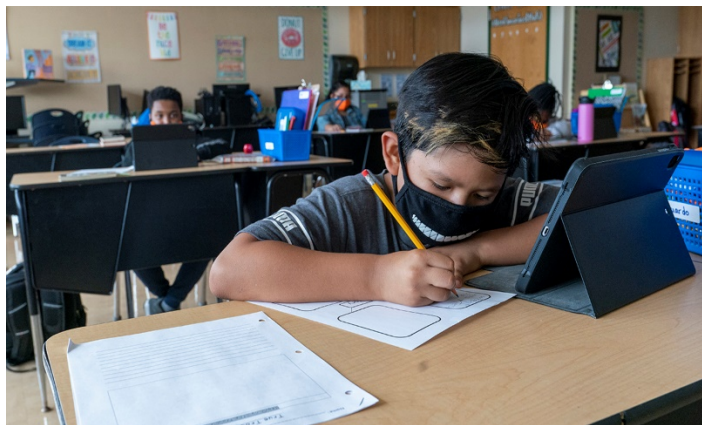
The district said it cannot manage in-person learning with more than 45 people absent by using substitute teachers, and that custodial staff was particularly hard hit.

Niles School District 219 has moved to remote learning for the next two weeks through Friday, Jan. 14. Tuesday will be an independent remote learning day to give students, staff and teachers flexibility to get tested. Instructions for the remote learning plan were emailed to students Monday.

All district buildings were open to students and staff to retrieve belongings on Monday.

Illinois News Live

COVID, Illinois: Elgin U-46 closes some schools, schools in Lincoln Way, Districts 33 and 219 are remote --- 1/3/2022



Elgin, Illinois (WLS)-Suburban school districts have been forced to close or reopen distance learning due to a shortage of staff due to COVID.

Elgin School District U-46 announced on Tuesday that five schools will be closed due to staff shortages and students in the remaining school districts will return to face-to-face learning. The five schools affected are:

- ☐ Highland Elementary
- ☐ Huff Elementary
- ☐ Independent Early Learning Center
- ☐ Parkwood Elementary
- ☐ Ridge Circle Elementary

Related: Chicago Teachers Union Plan Voting on Distance Education on Tuesday

In a letter to parents, U-46 coach Tony Sanders will determine when these schools can be reopened and whether other schools need to be closed in the next few days or weeks. In order to do so, the district said it would continue to check staff levels daily.

Lincolnway District 210 announced on Monday that due to staff shortages, all schools will return to distance learning until the weekend.

The district said it will implement an emergency e-learning plan outlined on the website, including live instruction provided through the district's web portal. Students who are unable to attend distance learning must call the attendance hotline for parents to report their absence.

Read more: The Illinois report records 20,866 new cases of COVID hospitalizations.

The school building was open on Monday and students were able to receive the necessary supplies from the lockers.

Lincoln-Way said it would continue to monitor the need for distance learning and notify parents as soon as possible of any changes.

West Chicago District 33 also announced that students will go to distance learning until Friday, thanks to a shortage of staff due to COVID cases. Last week, parents were notified when it was revealed that at least 75 of the 750 workers in the district, including teachers and support staff, would be absent this week due to a virus or other reason.

The school district said it was unable to manage face-to-face learning because more than 45 people were absent using substitute teachers, and the management staff was particularly hit.

Niles School District 210 has transitioned to distance learning for two weeks until Friday, January 14. Tuesday will be an independent distance learning day to give students, staff and

teachers the flexibility to take the test. A description of the distance learning plan was emailed to the students on Monday.

Buildings in all districts were open on Mondays for students and staff to collect their belongings.

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Daily Herald

‘Reach into the soul of Elgin’: City’s second poet laureate ready to Mann her post --- 1/3/2022

By Rick West

The city of Elgin has its second poet laureate.

That may be news to people who didn't know Elgin had a first poet laureate. Raising the profile will be part of Gareth Mann's new job.

The Elgin Poet Laureate Project began in 2018. At the time, Elgin was the only suburb to have a poet laureate. Aurora started a program in 2019.

Mann, 75, was part of the committee that chose Chasity Gunn to be the city's first poet laureate. Mann began her two-year term on Jan. 1.

"I'm looking forward to being able to share my enthusiasm for poetry in the community," she said. "I love the sounds of words, the rhythm of words, but it's the content that makes a poem really touch the reader's heart."

The purpose of the poet laureate is to celebrate the heritage, culture, and diversity of the city through the art and appreciation of poetry. Mann will be charged with writing and presenting poems specifically for local events like public holiday gatherings, graduations, dedications and the like.

"I think it can make an event special," she said. "It can also be a way to expose more people to poetry."

Mann is especially interested in that second part.

A longtime teacher, Mann has taught English, foreign languages and poetry at **Elgin, St. Edward and Streamwood high schools** and Elgin Academy. She also did a stint as a middle school gifted coordinator for Algonquin-based Community Unit District 300.

She began her writing career as a playwright and also penned several musicals, some of which were performed by area community theater groups.

She transitioned from writing musicals to poetry in the mid-70s.

"Songwriting is kind of the simplest poetry," she said.

For almost a decade, she's been running a poetry writing group at the Gail Borden Library that meets once a month. During the pandemic, she started a Facebook group called Pandemic Poetry. The nearly 150-member group shares what they've been writing since the pandemic began. Three of her recent poems were featured in an anthology called ["When We Turned Within: Reflections on COVID-19 \(Volume 2\)."](#)

Her background in poetry and teaching make her ideally suited for the job, said Jane Erlandson, part of the committee that chose Mann.

"Gareth is really active in the poetry community and has a lot of ideas about educational programs," Erlandson said. "We see this term as a way to grow more poets laureate."

She also hopes it's a term that can get them back on track after COVID-19 slowed down the momentum they were trying to build in the program's infancy. Gunn spent an extra year in the position because of the pandemic, but a lack of local events meant not much happened.

"This really is a formative term," Erlandson said, adding that there was a learning curve for the committee, who will now work more with the poet laureate to plan events. "Gareth was part of the instrument who began the program, so she's more prepared for that aspect."

Mann said the first big event she's organizing as Elgin's poet laureate is "Loving Elgin: A Poetry Celebration" on Feb. 13 at Gail Borden Library. She'll be soliciting people of all ages to write a poem about something they love about Elgin.

"My fantasy is to be able to reach into the soul of Elgin and have people feel things about our city and feel proud of being in Elgin," she said.

Writing poems on demand for specific events will be new for Mann, who said her poetry is more emotive.

"I don't think that a poet laureate should write terribly complicated poems," she said. "I think they should be clear and to the point and celebrate a particular event or person in the town. The people who hear them should enjoy it."

Mann said she and the committee will make everything she writes as poet laureate available to the public on their website or social media.

"The city owns me," she said with a laugh. "It's a job of public service, and it's important that I give the work to the people of the city if they want it."

Kane County Connects U-46 resumes in-person learning Jan. 4 --- 1/2/2022

School District U-46, the second-largest school district in Illinois, will resume in-person classes on Tuesday, Jan. 4, according to the [U-46 website](#).

"There is no option for School District U-46 to return to remote learning for all schools," U-46 Superintendent Tony Sanders said. "That option only exists for districts that have a state-approved e-learning plan (which we do not) or that participate in the state's competency-based learning pilot."

“As such, should we not have adequate staff to open due to the surge in cases, our only option would be to close all schools and extend the school year, similar to how we handle snow days.

“That said, just like you have seen this past year, individual classrooms may be closed at the directive of a county health department when an outbreak has been declared. If necessary, I can also make the determination to close individual schools or a classroom if the number of cases at a site are cause for concern.

“In those instances, remote learning will occur. It is always recommended that staff and students take their devices home with them in the event a classroom/school is closed.”

Daily Herald

‘The heartbeat of Elgin High School’: Friends gather to surprise former secretary for her 88th birthday --- 1/1/2022

By Rick West



Susan Fortner reacts on Friday as a group of about 50 friends surprised her for her birthday at her Elgin home. *Rick West | Staff Photographer*

Susan Fortner of Elgin often jokes with friends that the whole world celebrates her birthday on Dec. 31.

It may not have been the whole world, but you wouldn't have known it by her reaction to the crowd that surreptitiously gathered Friday on her front lawn to wish the beloved former **Elgin High School** secretary a happy 88th birthday.

"I'm overwhelmed," Fortner said. "There aren't any real words I can say. I just love every one of the people here, and I can tell you a story about all of them."

The surprise was organized by friend and former EHS teacher Melisa Creighton.

"She was the heartbeat of Elgin High School," Creighton said. "She always had a smile for every teacher, for every parent, for every visitor to the school.

"You always left her desk feeling better."

Fortner was the secretary to five principals for 37 years before retiring in 2017. She was the 2013 winner of the Kane County Regional Office of Education "support staff of the year" award.

"Anyone who has gone through Elgin High School, former students, teachers, administrators, whoever, she's just beloved to all of us," said Creighton, who was a teacher at EHS for 12 years before becoming a teacher mentor for Elgin Area School District U-46 over the past six years.

Creighton said whenever she runs into anyone from EHS, the first question is always about Fortner.

"I know it isn't a decade birthday," Creighton said. "But I just thought this was a really good time in a really crazy world for people to celebrate her."

The city of Elgin agreed.

Mayor David Kaptain was among the more than 50 people at Fortner's home. He read a proclamation declaring Dec. 31 "Susan Fortner Day" in Elgin.

Creighton regularly visits Fortner for lunch. Before this visit, she let on that she had a little birthday surprise for her.

But Fortner wasn't expecting what she saw when she opened her front door. She spent the first several minutes fighting back and wiping away tears.

"You are so special and so dear to all of us," Creighton said to Fortner before the crowd broke out in three choruses of "Happy Birthday."

"We all hold you so close in our hearts," she said, "and we are all better because of you."

Afterward, it was Creighton who had to fight back tears.

"We just adore this woman," she said. "She's done so much for Elgin High School, for the school district, and for all of us former teachers and students."

Elgin Courier-News

Surging COVID numbers prompt cancellation of in-person library programs, city meetings, but U-46 to resume in-person classes Tuesday --- 12/31/2021

By Gloria Casas



People wait in line for free COVID-19 tests in Chicago. Confirmed cases are escalating at a fast pace, prompting the city of Elgin and the Gail Borden Public Library in Elgin to cancel in-person meetings and events through January. (Taylor Glascock/The New York Times)

Gail Borden Public Library has canceled all in-person programs and the city of Elgin is moving council, commission and board meetings online as COVID-19 cases again surge in Kane County.

However, **School District U-46** will not be switching to remote learning when classes resume Tuesday, Jan. 4, according to a message from Superintendent Tony Sanders posted Thursday on the district's website, www.u-46.org.

"There is no option for School District U-46 to return to remote learning for all schools," Sanders wrote. "That option only exists for districts that have a state-approved e-learning plan (which we do not) or that participate in the state's competency-based learning pilot.

"As such, should we not have adequate staff to open due to the surge in cases, our only option would be to close all schools and extend the school year, similar to how we handle snow days."

City spokeswoman Molly Gillespie said the decision to move public meetings online was driven by the quickly escalating number of coronavirus cases being reported in Kane County.

"Safety remains our top priority, and we continue monitoring the COVID-19 situation," city spokeswoman Molly Gillespie said. "The recent spike in COVID-19 cases in Kane County, along with the holiday season and the omicron variant, has risen valid concerns about in-person gatherings."

The number of confirmed coronavirus cases in Kane has escalated from 362 on Dec. 1 to 1,130 on Dec. 29, according to data on the [county's COVID-19 dashboard](#). Just a week previous, on Dec. 22, the confirmed case count was 694, data shows.

A more telling figure might be the hospitalization rate. According to the Illinois Department of Public Health, there are 664 ICU hospital beds in Region 10, which includes Kane County, and 90% of them were occupied as of Friday. Only 65 remained available.

Elgin City Council meetings will be continue to be held at City Hall but council members will have the option of attending virtually if they prefer and the public can view the proceedings via live online streaming, Gillespie said.

All other boards and commissions will meet virtually through the end of January.

No decision has been made as to whether other changes will be made, Gillespie said.

"We also continue to have pandemic-related safety measures in place at city facilities," she said. "While nothing has been canceled to date, staff is evaluating any potential impacts to its currently scheduled events and programs."

Gail Borden library spokeswoman Denise Raleigh said the decision to cancel live programming through the end of January just made sense.

“It really is about keeping our staff and our public safe,” she said. “The (library) board has shown throughout COVID to be really concerned about safety. We have clear direction from them that safety is imperative.”

Programming that had been planned for children, teens, adults and seniors will either be rescheduled, pre-recorded or moved to Zoom or Facebook, Raleigh said.

“We are urging everyone to look at the website and click on events” for updates, she said. The library’s website address is www.gailborden.info.

Because library programming has been canceled and the library closed in the past because of the pandemic, staff has become skilled at shifting to remote programming, Raleigh said.

“We are always working on new technologies,” she said. “I think we will add a new platform that will ease the stress on the existing ones. We know flexibility has been the name of the game the last two years in delivering services.”

The library buildings will remain open, Raleigh said. Each branch has upgraded filtration systems, which provides a safer environment, she said.

(For information on COVID-19 testing locations, go to dph.illinois.gov/covid19/testing.html.)

Kane County Connects 20 school outbreaks in Kane County --- 12/31/2021

As 2021 comes to an end, Kane County is recording 20 COVID-19 school outbreaks, according to data posted by the Illinois Department of Public Health.

The IDPH outbreak report was last updated today (Friday, Dec. 30, 2021). Data includes entries elicited from cases opened within the previous 30 days from date of update.



Outbreaks new to the list this week are Illinois Math & Science Academy in Aurora and Jewel Middle School in North Aurora. The number of cases went up at Wild Rose Elementary School in St. Charles.

- [Click here to visit the IDPH School Outbreaks page.](#)

Of course, schools are closed for the holiday break, many through the first week in January, so this report might not change much over the next couple weeks.

Outbreak information is reported once clusters of cases are confirmed to be linked by location and time (within 14 days). Some outbreaks are pending processing and evaluation and will be added as more complete information is available.

The outbreak information is reported by local health departments to the Illinois Department of Public Health through an outbreak reporting system.

Specific outbreaks included are those that have been identified by the Kane County Health Department to have three or more COVID-19 cases who may have a shared exposure at a shared Youth Related location and are from different households.

These outbreaks do not include secondary cases that may occur in a household member who has not been at the same outbreak location.

All data is provisional and subject to updating as more information becomes available. Data are updated once a week, typically on Fridays. The IDPH says this data includes entries elicited from cases opened within the previous 30 days from the date of the update.

School Outbreaks as of Thursday, Dec. 30

Dundee-Crown High School (K-12)

- Less Than 5 Cases
- Students
- Source: Classroom
- First Reported: 12/9/2021

Elgin Academy (K-12)

- 10 Cases
- Students
- Source: Sports
- First Reported: 12/9/2021

Ferson Creek Elementary (K-12)

- Less Than 5 Cases
- Students
- Source: Classroom
- First Reported: 12/16/2021

Gary D. Wright Elementary School (K-12)

- 13 Cases
- Staff and Students
- Source: Classroom
- First Reported: 11/18/2021

Gates Elementary School (K-12)

- Less Than 5 Cases
- Students
- Source: Classroom
- First Reported: 12/2/2021

Geneva High School (K-12)

- Less Than 5 Cases

- Staff and Students
- Source: Sports
- First Reported: 12/13/2021

Geneva Middle School North (K-12)

- 10 Cases
- Staff and Students
- Source: Classroom
- First Reported: 12/22/2021

Harter Middle School (K-12)

- Less Than 5 Cases
- Students
- Source: Classroom
- First Reported: 12/17/2021

Heartland Elementary School (K-12)

- Less Than 5 Cases
- Staff and Students
- Source: Classroom
- First Reported: 12/7/2021

Illinois Math And Science Academy (K-12)*

- Less Than 5 Cases
- Staff
- Source: Other
- First Reported: 12/29/2021

Jefferson Middle School (K-12)

- Less Than 5 Cases
- Staff and Students
- Source: Classroom
- First Reported: 12/22/2021

Jewel Middle School (K-12)*

- 10 Cases
- Students
- Source: Classroom
- First Reported: 12/21/2021

John Shields Elementary School (K-12)

- Less Than 5 Cases
- Students
- Source: Classroom
- First Reported: 12/9/2021

Kaneland High School (K-12)

- 5 Cases
- Students
- Source: Classroom
- First Reported: 12/17/2021

O'Donnell Elementary (K-12)

- 5 Cases
- Students
- Source: Classroom
- First Reported: 12/14/2021

Ronald O'Neal Elementary School (K-12)

- 5 Cases
- Staff and Students
- Source: Classroom
- First Reported: 12/10/2021

South Elgin High School (K-12)

- 8 Cases
- Staff and Students
- Source: Other
- First Reported: 11/24/2021

St. Peter School (K-12)

- Less Than 5 Cases

- Students
- Source: Classroom
- First Reported: 11/12/2021

West Aurora High School (K-12)

- 12 Cases
- Students
- Source: Sports
- First Reported: 12/22/2021

Wild Rose Elementary School (K-12)

- 14 Cases
- Staff and Students
- Source: Classroom
- First Reported: 11/15/2021

SOURCE: IDPH website

Elgin Courier-News

Elgin man with autism finds new confidence, skills thanks to Harper College's career program --- 12/31/2021

By Mike Danahey



Eric Hiller, of Elgin, stands in front of the Ziegler's Ace Hardware in Bartlett, where he works. Hiller has autism and he and his parents say what he learned at Harper College's Career Skills Institute helped him find new confidence and solid workplace skills. - Original Credit: (Harper College / HANDOUT)

After Eric Hiller graduated from **Bartlett High School** in 2019, his mother looked for a program that would help build her autistic son's employment skills.

She found exactly what she wanted at Harper College's Career Skills Institute in Palatine, Agatha Donaldson-Hiller said.

And that's helped 24-year-old Eric improve his capabilities as a part-time employee at Ziegler's Ace Hardware in Bartlett.

“(The Harper program) “taught me it’s important to go on time, to listen, to ask for help, to help others, to follow the rules and to get along with coworkers,” Eric said.

Donaldson-Hiller said she met with Linda Hoeck, the program’s founder and coordinator, who retired in September, “and I left extremely happy.”

“Eric likes to be on the computer, and I had heard about programs that could teach him computer skills,” she said. “Linda knew exactly what I was talking about. It was something I hoped Eric could do.”

Eric turned out to like it a lot,” said Hiller’s father, also named Eric.



Elgin resident and Bartlett High School graduate Eric Hiller completed Harper College’s Career Skills Institute, which has helped him at his part-time job at Ziegler’s Ace Hardware in Bartlett. Hiller's autism can sometimes make him reluctant to try new things, but his parents say the institute gave him more confidence. - Original Credit: (Harper College / HANDOUT)

School District U-46 recently started referring people to the program, said Sharon Basten, who now oversees the Career Services Institute. Two students who attended U-46 schools are currently enrolled and eight U-46 graduates have taken part over the years, she said.

Eric completed the two-year program in July, after which he and his family moved to Elgin’s east side.

Eric said he found the CSI instructors quite helpful. “They made me feel comfortable,” Hiller said.

The institute is designed for young adults who were in special education programs in high school and who are not able to attend traditional college classes, Hoeck said.

Those who complete it receive a portfolio assessment and a certificate of completion, which compiles their academic and job skills and provides information on any support they might need.

In Illinois, students with autism can attend public school until age 22. About 10 years ago, a group of parents called Ken Ender, who was Harper's president at the time, looking for workplace training and support for their post-high school autistic children.

Ender reached out to Hoeck, who had been the autism coordinator for the Northwest Suburban Special Education Organization co-op.

Since 2011, about 98 students have gone through the program, Basten said. Class sizes are kept small, with about 14 students in each class, she said.

The institute is run out of Harper College, but it's not limited to students who live within the college district's boundaries.

Donaldson-Hiller said it costs \$5,000 a year for a student to attend, but financial aid is available. Eric applied for and received a Joseph Goldberg scholarship, which covered tuition for both years, she said.

"That was a blessing," Donaldson-Hiller said.

Her son is typically resistant to change and reluctant to try new things, she said.

"His first words are, 'I can't do it,' and my response has been, 'How do you know you can't do it until you try?'" she said.

Eric gradually learned to like the program, which he attended four hours a day three days a week, his parents said. When pandemic restrictions were put in place, he learned how to take virtual classes via video conferencing, they said.

Eric was also taught job interview skills, and secured a program-related internship through which he helped maintain equipment for Harper's gym, pool and other athletic facilities.

One of the biggest benefits has been seeing Eric's comfort level grow in a variety of settings, Donaldson-Hiller said. He has enough confidence not to be afraid to ask questions, she said.

"I love to see that in him. I really do," she said.

Eric was born three months prematurely, weighing less than two pounds, his father said. The couple have two much older sons, so they consider him their miracle baby, he said. "It's amazing the progress Eric has made over the years," Eric Hiller Sr. said. "With him finishing CSI, I am so proud of him and of how he has matured."

Daily Herald

Girls' Basketball: Lake Forest downs South Elgin for 3rd at Komaromy Classic --- 12/31/2021

By Rusty Silber, Daily Herald Correspondent

Lake Forest made its first trip into the Dundee-Crown Komaromy Classic a good one.

The Scouts reached the semifinals before losing to North Suburban Conference rival Stevenson and then recovered in the third-place game, racing past **South Elgin** 55-35 in Carpentersville on Thursday night.

"Defense is what won the game for us," Lake Forest coach Stacey Leach said. "That's what we can control and we did really well. We did come in not knowing what to expect and the girls played that underdog part. I don't think anybody else expected us to be here and they came out proved themselves."

Lake Forest (11-6) was led by Rachel Kaus with 18 points and 11 rebounds, and Becca Ranallo with 13 points.

"Rebounding is important because it helps the team get another possession," Kaus said, "especially on offense to get another chance or another shot. It really helps my team to win."

South Elgin (12-3) built a 22-17 lead midway through the second quarter with patience and poise.

Kaus scored 7 points including a layup with 30 seconds left that capped off 12 unanswered points for a 29-22 LF lead at the break.

"When were playing as a team more and get together," Kaus said, "we can rotate the ball more. Passing the ball has really helped us. We just attack the basket and stay strong on offense, and taking our time."

The Storm tried to rally in the third quarter, but every time they cut the lead Lake Forest had an answer to extend the lead out to double digits.

Zoie Lewis led South Elgin with 10 points and 6 rebounds. Caroline Croft had 10 points and Ella Winterhalder chipped in with 9.

"There's not a lot of teams that are still playing for something," South Elgin coach Dan Mandernack said. "Playing for the third-place trophy, you have to come out with that urgency. I thought we threw that first punch. We don't get many second chances since we basically start five guards. We got beat up on the boards and got exposed a little bit."

South Elgin won its first two games in the tournament but lost to Barrington in the semifinals.

"We did see all different types of stuff and will have more time to prepare for it," Mandernack said. "We just have to be positive. Barrington was an awesome team. Lake Forest is just awfully hot right now and playing really good basketball. We're just building bricks, and that's another brick going 2-2 and we've got three straight home games."