

Press Clippings 3/30/2022

Chicago Tribune/The Courier-News

Elgin News Digest: School board to OK spending \$75,000 on conference --- 3/25/2022

By Mike Danahey

School District U-46 is planning to spend up \$75,000 to send as many as 45 educators to the Building Expertise Conference being held by Learning Sciences International in June in Orlando, Florida.

The conference will focus on the concepts of rigor and equity in learning and education, and some of those staff members who attend will be giving a presentation at the event, Deputy Superintendent of Instruction Suzanne Johnson told the U-46 School Board this past week.

The \$75,000 covering the cost of hotel accommodations, airfare, transportation, meals and conference sessions will be funded with money from the federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund, Johnson said.

School board members are expected to approve the expenditure at their April 11 meeting.

CBS Chicago

In some suburban districts, hundreds of thousands of dollars in school-owned electronics went missing amid remote learning --- 3/25/2022

By Tara Molina

<https://www.cbsnews.com/chicago/video/some-suburban-districts-saw-major-losses-in-school-owned-electronics-amid-remote-learning/?intcid=CNM-00-10abd1h>

SCHAUMBURG, Ill. (CBS) -- Hundreds of thousands of dollars in school resources – and the taxpayer dollars that bought them – went down the drain in multiple suburban districts at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

For months, we have been filing public records requests and pouring over data to determine just how much went missing – and which three suburban districts lost the most money.

As CBS 2's Tara Molina reported, the schools call this an issue of "lost property." It is considered lost because it was never returned.

The property in question includes hundreds of thousands of dollars in computers, Chromebooks, tablets, and other valuable items that were school district property. It was unaccounted for after schools transitioned into remote learning during the height of the pandemic.

We wanted to know exactly how much went missing and what it cost to replace it, so CBS 2 filed public records requests with school districts across the Chicago area. The requests focused in on the 2018-2019 school year through the 2020-2021 school year – when many returned to some kind of in-classroom learning.

One of the affected districts is in Schaumburg, where the losses total more than \$30,000. But at least one district we know of lost more than \$500,000.

Of the 10 largest suburban districts in the Chicago area, three are at the top of the list, In order, they are Elgin, Plainfield, and Schaumburg.

In Elgin, \$269,000 of school property went missing - more than a quarter million dollars. The property lost included 819 Chromebooks, 54 iPads, three laptops, and 11 mobile hotspots.

A spokesperson for **Elgin Area School District U-46** told us they're in the middle of auditing all of their equipment, and then they'll review and recover as much as possible:

"Please note that these records do date back to 2018, and cover more than three complete school years, including the early days of the pandemic, during which we distributed thousands of Chromebooks and iPads, almost overnight, to students to allow for remote learning.

"School District U-46 is currently in the midst of a physical audit of all our equipment, expected to take about two more months. Once that is completed, we will review the results and create a plan to recover as much of this equipment as possible.

"Regarding the fitness trackers, they have been assigned to high school students in physical education classes for several reasons, including during remote learning when the data was reported back to teachers for grading. We also have high school students who use them to track their activity for their independent physical education course."

In Plainfield, the district lost \$101,000 in the form of 202 laptops and 185 mobile hotspots.

A Plainfield School District 202 spokesperson said the district has implemented changes since then, with a fee system for students so they are responsible if a laptop is damaged or not returned.

"We have instituted a student fee system, so students are responsible if the laptop is damaged or not returned."

"Staff have always been responsible for the cost of their laptops if they go missing or are damaged."

"We are also looking at our processes for being able to follow and find families if/when they leave the district. This is complicated by laws which limit the amount of type of info we can collect about our students and families. And like everything else, made even more difficult by our size."

"As another example of the impact of the pandemic, think about how many people chose to disenroll from public education and go to private school or to home school. We have no access to them, generally speaking."

In Schaumburg, 50 iPads and 43 Chromebooks were lost, totaling \$30,029. Schaumburg Community Consolidated School District 54 had not issued a comment late Friday.

Daily Herald

YMCA Elgin Leader Luncheon announces 2022 nominees ---

3/27/2022

Submitted by Pat Szpekowski



The YWCA Elgin will host its 38th annual Leader Luncheon on Thursday, May 12, at The Seville in Streamwood. Twenty women leaders have been nominated this year for these prestigious awards.

The event is supported by Title sponsor The Schrieber Group of Elgin, and Leader Circle sponsors, Amita Health St. Joseph Hospital Elgin and Elgin Community College.

Recipients will be awarded at the luncheon with Sharon Bush of the Grand Victoria Foundation as the keynote speaker. Hundreds of community leaders, business representatives and volunteers attend this time-honored tradition of celebrating Elgin area women leaders.

The following have been nominated this year by their colleagues and peers.

- Margaret Hillis Award for the Arts: Ivette De Santiago, assistant director, Side Street Studios
- Beatrice Dorsey Award for Business & Professions: Jennifer Cook, owner, Cook's Ice Cream & Cook's Sweet Boutique; Sheri De Shazo, president, Advocate Sherman Hospital; Sierra Dunner, owner, SieFit Fitness Studio; Melissa Hernandez, president, Northern Kane County Chamber of Commerce; and Dr. Karen Love, program chair, Bachelor's and Masters of Organizational Leadership, Judson University
- Marguerite Henry Award for Communications & Technology: Mary Dulabaum, director of marketing and communications, Judson University
- Harriet Gifford & Hattie Griffin Award for Education: Cherie Aschenbrenner, senior liaison, Department of Neighborhood Services, City of Elgin; AnnMarie Dufelmeier, assistant principal, St. Edward's Central Catholic High School Elgin; Cathy Taylor, dean of sustainability, business and career technologies division, Elgin Community College; and Teresa Winters, executive director, School District U-46
- Myrtle Spiegler Gerberding Award for Public Service: Barb Keselica, assistant director, City of Elgin Parks and Recreation Department; Heidi Holthusen, supervisor, Elgin Police Department Communications Shift; Martha Martinez, manager, Pandemic Health Navigator Program, Gail Borden Public Library; and Tissanie Simmons, owner, Pine Cone Events Venue
- Betty Brown Award for Racial Justice: Brittney Nicole Walker, owner, Brittney Walker Consulting LLC
- Marie Grolich Award for Social Services: Sister Leticia M. Lapid, OSF, spiritual care chaplain, Amita Health St. Joseph Hospital Elgin;

- Marjorie Leonard Award for Volunteer & Community Service: Mariana Barriga, volunteer, Elgin Community College; Linda Ramirez, owner, Goosehead Insurance; and Mary Jo Sheehy, retired nurse and volunteer.

For information about the luncheon, tickets to the event, and/or sponsorship, contact the YWCA Elgin at (847) 742-7930 or visit ywcaelgin.ywca.org/LL.

The luncheon, featuring keynote speaker Sharon Bush, president of the Grand Victoria Foundation, will be 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Tickets are \$55 or \$50 for YWCA members.

Chicago Tribune

Illinois board of ed considers changing state's standardized testing to 3 times a year, but some educators push back ---

3/28/2022

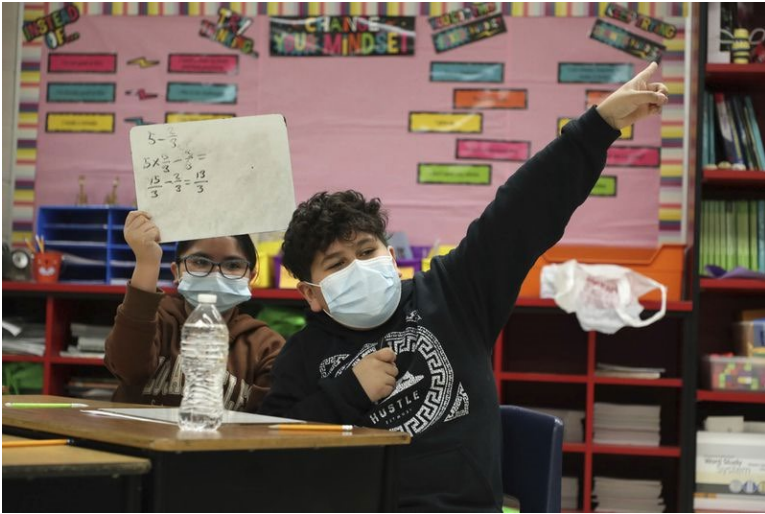
By Karen Anne Cullotta

Despite opposition from some teachers and parents, the Illinois State Board of Education is considering replacing the state's annual student assessment with interim testing throughout the school year, including an option to test children as young as kindergarten.

ISBE officials said last week there is not yet a specific proposal on the table, and any changes to the current Illinois Assessment of Readiness would have to be allowed by federal law and approved by the U.S. Department of Education.

But the state recently hired the New Hampshire-based nonprofit Center for Assessment to analyze the results of a statewide survey about how to make the state assessment more useful to families and educators, including the possibility of abandoning the annual IAR, and testing students several times a year, to better gauge learning gaps.

The state's Board of Education was scheduled to vote last June on a request for proposals to design and deliver new interim assessments for elementary school students, but the plan was paused to give educators and parents more time to weigh in, officials said at the time.



Yakciry Nieto, left, and Eliel Valenica Palomino participate in fourth grade math class at **Lords Park Elementary School** in Elgin on March 24, 2022. Fourth graders enrolled in the dual language program at Lords Park Elementary would need to sit for state assessments at least three times a year under an Illinois State Board of Education proposal that is facing opposition from educators, including some at Elgin-based Unit School District 46. (Stacey Wescott / Chicago Tribune)

“Our students have lost so much classroom instructional time during the pandemic, and now the state is considering doing more testing? It doesn’t make sense,” said Monique Redeaux-Smith, a former Chicago Public Schools teacher and the professional issues director for the Illinois Federation of Teachers union.

“I agree with ISBE that now is the time to change, because the IAR is not meeting our needs, but whatever we re-imagine has to be based on evidence and based in equity,” Redeaux-Smith said.

Long the bane of educators and parents, the annual, federally required assessment of students’ math, reading and language arts skills is delivered statewide to children in third through eighth grades near the end of the school year, with the test results posted each fall on the Illinois Report Card.

While foes of so-called high-stakes, standardized assessments say the tests waste valuable classroom learning time, with no evidence to show the costly programs provide any benefits to student achievement, ISBE officials say they hope to improve the program and enhance equity.

In a recent survey of 5,000 teachers and parents, when asked, “Do you support a state assessment system characterized by multiple short tests throughout the year instead of a single, long end-of-year test?,” approximately 60% percent said yes, 20% said no, and 20% were undecided, ISBE officials said.

In addition, 75% of respondents said they are not satisfied with the current state assessment.

ISBE officials said the majority of the state's more than 850 school districts are already doing interim assessments for students and paying for the programs themselves.

"Offering the assessment to districts for free from the state would save districts money, allow underfunded districts the same opportunity to access student growth data prior to third grade, and ensure alignment to the assessment for grades three through eight," ISBE spokeswoman Jackie Matthews said.



Dual language teacher Sara Balbas Altes teaches math to fourth graders at Lords Park Elementary School in Elgin on March 24, 2022. (Stacey Wescott / Chicago Tribune)

"Our one and only goal in exploring any improvements to the assessment is to better meet the needs of educators and families," Matthews said, adding that any assessment offered to students in kindergarten through second grade "would be optional, developmentally appropriate and would never be a part of accountability."

Unlike the annual IAR assessments, which are typically administered at schools each spring, a move to interim assessments would feature shorter tests given several times during the school year, such as during fall, winter and spring.

One frequent complaint about the IAR is that test results are not released to teachers until their students are no longer in their classrooms. Matthews said an interim testing model "could provide more timely and actionable results to families and teachers."

An interim testing program would also "reduce the amount of time spent on an end-of-year summative test, increase equity in access to students' performance data during the school year, and make the assessment experience less stressful for students," Matthews said.

While the state board has yet to unveil a new assessment proposal, officials with the Chicago Teachers Union expressed dismay at the prospect of the state ramping up student testing at a time when many students are already struggling.

“We should not burden students already battered by two years of this pandemic with the stress and struggle that these costly, harmful tests create,” CTU Communications Director Chris Geovanis said in a statement Friday.

“Instead, ISBE should use those vital public dollars to address students’ desperate need for social-emotional supports and resources to support their right to recovery from this pandemic,” Geovanis said.

In the past, CPS leaders “have used test scores as an excuse to justify their austerity budgets and label the chronically underfunded schools of our Black and Brown students as failures worthy only of closure or racist ‘turn-arounds.’ Yet there’s simply no research evidence that tests like this proposed \$228 million contract improve either teaching or students’ learning,” Geovanis said.

ISBE officials said the state board does not yet have a proposal, but have estimated the cost of interim assessments with an initial term of five years and a five-year renewal option not to exceed \$228 million over the course of 10 years.

The state is currently paying Pearson — the multinational publishing and education company that provides the IAR test — about \$55 million for three years of assessments. That includes \$18.6 million for 2020, when only about a quarter of students took the exams before they were halted because of the pandemic, ISBE officials said last year.

The contract also paid Pearson an amount not to exceed \$15.6 million to administer the assessments in 2021, and an estimated \$21 million in 2022, ISBE officials said.

Illinois Sen. Cristina Pacione-Zayas, a Chicago Democrat, recently spearheaded the Too Young to Test Act, which would prohibit standardized tests for Illinois’ youngest students, except for the case of diagnostic tests including determining eligibility for special education services, bilingual services, dyslexia interventions, observational tools like the Kindergarten Individual Development Survey and the federally mandated English Learner assessments.

“We’ve already taken significant time and resources away from student learning by having students jump right back into testing last spring, in the thick of the pandemic, and the results were what we predicted,” said Pacione-Zayas.

The [**2021 student assessments showed declines**](#) in academic proficiency during the COVID-19 pandemic across all demographics, with nearly 17% fewer students meeting grade-level standards in English language arts in 2021 than in 2019, and about 18% fewer students meeting grade-level standards in math. In addition, 1 in 5 students statewide was reported as chronically absent during the 2020-21 school year.

“Who won here? The testing companies,” Pacione-Zayas said, adding that instead of spending taxpayer dollars on multimillion-dollar contracts with testing companies, the state should use part of the \$7 billion in federal COVID-19 relief funding allocated to Illinois schools to improve resources in the classroom for students, and provide professional development for teachers.

“We need a radical transformation in our educational system, because what has been done in the past is not working,” Pacione-Zayas said.

Some experts are urging ISBE “to reject ‘through-year’ test designs that remove the boundary between high-stakes accountability tests and interim assessment.”

“We strongly believe in the utility of high-quality formative assessments that help teachers improve teaching and learning. Large-scale interim tests can help support that work, but have a fundamentally different purpose than accountability testing,” said John Burkey, executive director of the Large Unit District Association.

“Now is the time to be bold and design a better system,” said Burkey, one of several educators who expressed concerns at a recent ISBE meeting about any plan that would try to use frequent interim student testing as the accountability assessments required by federal law.

Officials at the state’s largest teachers’ union agree, saying when it comes to supporting students, “more testing is not the answer.”

“More testing does not mean better educated students or better schools,” Illinois Education Association President Kathi Griffin said.

“Too much testing does mean teachers are forced to spend valuable classroom time preparing for and administering tests instead of working with our students to meet their academic and social-emotional needs,” Griffin said.

At **Elgin-based Unit School District 46**, where more than 30% of students are English-language learners, officials have joined forces with large school districts across the state to demand that ISBE put the brakes on any plans to increase standardized testing, especially as most Illinois schools are already offering their own local interim assessments, including the MAP or i-Ready tests.

“To add a through-year assessment on top of what schools are already doing locally is just too much testing,” District 46 Superintendent Tony Sanders said.

“Having students take state assessments throughout the school year would have the feeling of high-stakes, accountability testing, even if it’s not,” Sanders said.

“The best assessments we have are local, and that data means the most, because it’s closest to the child in that moment in time,” Sanders said.

Daily Herald

‘It feels surreal’: Elgin native thrilled to play lead in national tour of ‘Moulin Rouge! The Musical’ in Chicago ---

3/29/2022

By Barbara Vitello

(Note: Elgin native Courtney Reed attended **Larkin High School).**



Courtney Reed and Conor Ryan star in "Moulin Rouge! The Musical" which kicks off its national tour at Chicago's James M. Nederlander Theatre. *Courtesy of Matthew Murphy for MurphyMade*

Broadway veteran **Courtney Reed** so loves "Moulin Rouge! The Musical" she would encourage people to see it even if she wasn't starring in the pandemic-delayed national tour, now in previews at Chicago's James M. Nederlander Theatre.

The **Elgin native** says the tuner has everything audiences expect from a Broadway show: spectacle, energy, familiar tunes and "a ginormous cast of hungry actors at the top of their game" and eager to be back on stage after nearly two years.

The Tony Award-winning musical was adapted from director Baz Luhrmann's 2001 film starring Nicole Kidman and Ewan McGregor.

"I fell in love with the film the first moment I saw it," said Reed, who performed with Light Opera Works (now Music Theater Works) in Evanston and with the now-defunct Noble Fool Theatre at the Pheasant Run Resort in St. Charles before leaving for New York where she originated the role of Jasmine in "Aladdin" on Broadway.

She plays the chanteuse Satine, a courtesan in 19th-century Paris pursued by a poor poet and a wealthy duke. With Karen Olivo, a woman of color, having originated the role on Broadway, it was apparent producers were "looking outside the box" when it came to casting, Reed said.



Elgin native Courtney Reed stars in the national touring production of "Moulin Rouge! The Musical" running through May 14 at Chicago's James M. Nederlander Theatre. -

"The climate of the industry is changing so quickly and I'm grateful," she said.

Reed auditioned for the show hoping to be cast in the New York or London production but was hired for the national tour, which, as a result of the pandemic, is commencing practically in her backyard.

"It feels surreal," she said. "Being home, doing this massive first national tour, getting to play the lead ... Every morning I wake up and think: 'Pinch me, I can't believe this is happening.'"

Reed wasn't the only one transfixed by Luhrmann's "Moulin Rouge!"

"I remember being so excited about what Baz was doing, smashing high culture and low culture together," said director Alex Timbers, who met Luhrmann at a 2013 dinner party and found they shared a similar aesthetic. Not long after, Luhrmann, who was familiar with Timbers from his direction of the musicals "Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson" and "Here Lies Love," asked him to helm "Moulin Rouge's" transfer to the stage.



Conor Ryan co-stars opposite Elgin native Courtney Reed in the national touring production of "Moulin Rouge! The Musical" running through May 14 at Chicago's James M. Nederlander Theatre.

"What's unique about this show is you're not dealing with a single songbook," he said, referring to the dozens of pop, rock and R&B songs that make up the score.

"We have a limitless catalog from last 100 years," Timbers said. "There's a medley of Rolling Stones songs for the Duke. The perfect song didn't exist so we put them together" in a way that serves the story.

He approached the show as a fan, which meant delivering what they expected but in a new and surprising way. And, while they couldn't duplicate Luhrmann's stylized camera work, Timbers and his team used lighting, nonlinear storytelling and other theatrical devices to create a version "that speaks to the film but creates our own theatrical language." Those efforts earned the director a 2020 Tony Award.



Audiences can expect a grand spectacle, familiar tunes and lots of energy from "Moulin Rouge! The Musical," whose inaugural national tour is in previews at Chicago's James M. Nederlander Theatre. - Courtesy of Matthew Murphy for MurphyMade

"The things I love about the show are how immersive and spectacular it is," said Timbers. "It's going to be an enveloping experience that vibrates with theatricality and electricity. That's my hope."

He describes the musical as a celebration of bohemian ideals: truth, beauty, freedom and love.

"In this world those are principles worth celebrating and embracing," he said. "That's what this show does for 2½ hours."

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"Moulin Rouge! The Musical"

When: 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Thursday and Friday; 2 and 7:30 p.m. Sunday and Wednesday; 2 and 8 p.m. Saturday through May 14. Also 2 p.m. April 7. No 2 p.m. show April 6, 27, May 4; no 7:30 p.m. show April 10, 17 and 24

Where: James M. Nederlander Theatre, 24 W. Randolph St., Chicago, (800) 775-2000, broadwayinchicago.com

Tickets: \$49-\$139

COVID-19 precautions: Proof of vaccination or negative COVID-19 test and masks required

The Examiner of Bartlett

Dist. U-46 Board ratifies series of RIF proposals ---

3/30/2022

By Seth Hancock- Note: This story also ran in The Examiner of South Elgin and in The Examiner of Streamwood

The **Board of Education in School District U-46** unanimously approved reductions in force (RIF) and reassignments effecting 217 staff members.

The annual human resources (HR) resolutions are presented and voted on over several meetings each year.

“In order to follow state guidelines that allow for staff dismissal up until 45 days before the end of the school year, the assistant superintendent of human resources... annually presents personnel categories that are eligible for possible dismissal,” said Superintendent Tony Sanders. “Depending on the budget situation and when programs and classes are determined for the next school year, some of these individuals may be rehired providing they have proper licensure. While the Board of Education takes this action very seriously, dismissal consideration is customary at this time of year in order to follow state requirements.”

By a unanimous vote on Feb. 28, the board approved the honorable dismissal of 83 teachers which included full-time, part-time and temporary staff, according to Kerry Foderaro, interim assistant superintendent for HR.

“We should be able to hire back approximately 90 percent of these people after May 1,” Foderaro said.

Another 62 staff members were a part of honorable dismissal of teachers were a part of a series of resolutions unanimously approved on March 7. Also approved was non-renewal of 24 first- through third-year probationary teachers, honorable dismissal of eight education support personnel (funded projects), honorable dismissal of seven non-union support personnel, dismissal of five final-year probationary teachers and non-renewal of administrative contract and reassignment of one tenured administrator.

Two resolutions on March 14 were approved 5-0, board members John Devereux and Veronica Noland were absent.

Included was non-renewal of 26 building substitute teachers who Foderaro said “we anticipate we will rehire the vast majority if not all of them back,” and non-renewal of one first- through third-year probationary teacher.

The Examiner of Bartlett

Boiler replacements set for five U-46 school sites ---

3/30/2022

By Seth Hancock – Note: This story also ran in The Examiner of South Elgin and in The Examiner of Streamwood

Boiler replacements will take place this summer at five **School District U46** schools.

The work on the \$1.9 million project, from the operations and maintenance fund, will take place between June 8 and July 25 at Streamwood’s Heritage Elementary School, Bartlett’s Independence Center for Early Learning and Elgin’s Ron O’Neal Elementary School through Mechanical, Inc. (\$1.1 million), Coleman in Elgin and Wayne elementary schools through Ideal Heating Company (\$878,221).

“The boilers at Coleman, Heritage, Independence, Ron O’Neal, and Wayne are at the end of their expected lifecycles,” the proposal stated. “As a result, it takes a great deal of manpower and resources to simply maintain these pieces of equipment. Due to their age, administration can no longer source some of the parts needed for repairs. Thus, these critical building systems need to be replaced before they fail.”

The item was among \$2.1 million in operations and maintenance items approved 7-0 by the Board of Education at its Feb. 28 meeting.

Included was a \$49,800 proposal with Weaver Consultants Group for an asbestos three-year reinspection and management plan update, which the proposal stated is required under “state and federal regulations.”

Presented and approved that evening was \$57,698 to Diemer Plumbing and Excavating for emergency water main and sewer repairs at Elgin High School that took place in December.

“Over winter break, the Elgin Fire Department called Plant Operations staff to report that there appeared to be a water main leak outside at Elgin High School,” the proposal stated.

“Upon investigation, our grounds department was able to confirm that there was indeed a broken line, which was discovered to be the result of a break in the water main that supported the building’s sprinkler system.”

Also unanimously approved was \$11.9 million in itemized bills as well as the school fees for the 2022-2023 school year. Instructional fees will be waived for the second straight year while optional fees, like athletic participation and driver’s education, will remain the same as last year.

The Examiner of Streamwood

Sabres baseball looking forward to a full season ---

3/30/2022

By Seth Hancock

The **Streamwood** baseball team is eager to get the 2022 season swinging in full gear.

This will be the first, let’s call it normal, year for coach Dan Jennings as the Sabres skipper. Jennings took over as coach in 2020 when no season took place because of lockdowns, and last year was shortened with no postseason.

“We are grateful to be back with a full schedule,” Jennings said. “This year feels a little more normal. We look forward to getting out on the field and competing every day. We are lucky to have this game, and we know what it is like when it is taken away.”

Whether has hampered the Sabres’ early schedule, but they did open with a tough 1-0 nonconference loss against Hoffman Estates on March 15 at Streamwood.

Streamwood’s pitching staff did a strong job, but Hoffman Estates tallied the game’s lone run in the sixth inning off junior reliever Carter Blanchard (two innings, three hits, one walk, two strikeouts). Sophomore Miguel Rodriguez went five innings in the start allowing eight hits, walking three and striking out four.

The Sabres got hits from seniors Kevin Lunz and Jacob Gama along with Blanchard, Rodriguez and junior Nick Weaver.

“We had many opportunities to score with guys in scoring position with less than two outs,” Jennings said. “We just never got the big hit. Our guys pitched it and defended it pretty well all night. We executed some small ball plays but only had a few hits, three of them being in the infield.”