

## Press Clippings 7/02/2022 to 7/05/2022

### Daily Herald

#### Learning On the Go provides books, lunch, fun for young kids in Elgin area --- 7/01/2022

By Rick West



Aileen Moreno, left, peeks over as friend Melanie Aguirre laughs at a book passage Thursday during a Learning On the Go session at Century Oaks Elementary in Elgin. The girls are both 5, and Melanie is on her mom Ofelia's lap. Rick West | Staff Photographer

Amber Peters was noticeably happy as she watched two dozen families spread out on blankets with new books under a shade tree.

Elgin Partnership for Early Learning's Learning On the Go -- a two-month program designed to provide family engagement and early learning opportunities for kids age 5 and younger -- has hit the halfway point of its summer run. And on Thursday, roughly 10 new families stopped by at **Century Oaks Elementary School** in Elgin.

"What I love about this is that the parents come out and engage with each other and engage with their children," said Peters, executive director of the Elgin Partnership for Early Learning. "And teachers are modeling readiness skills that we hope the parents take home and use to reinforce this one hour to build a strong foundation for their kids."

The program, which is in its sixth year, operates in areas chosen based on community data about families who might not be accessing resources like child care, health care and the library.

Anywhere from 30 to 50 kids turn out each week at the seven spots -- five in Elgin and two in Hanover Park. The one-hour sessions include a read-along, some song and dance time and then a craft that encourages learning through play.

Each child gets free lunch provided by **Elgin Area School District U-46** and a new book each week, which they can choose in either English or Spanish. On their first visit, they get a book bag with learning supplies that they bring back each week.

"What's interesting is that we serve more Hispanic families but give away more books in English," Peters said.

On Thursday, kids followed along in their own copies as teachers read "We Are in a Book!" in English and Spanish ("!Estamos en un libro!").

Peters said a lot of new families join each week, but she likes seeing the repeat visitors.

"We know we're making more of an impact if they come weekly," she said. "And different partners can come in and offer resources and services."

The YWCA was on hand Thursday to offer child care assistance, either with funding or enrollment in the head start programs in the community. So was the Northern Illinois Food Bank's mobile food pantry, which drew long lines of cars in the school parking lot. Staffers there referred families with children over to Learning on the Go.

"We're working together to feed bodies and feed minds at the same time," Peters said. "They go hand in hand."

For site locations and schedules, visit [elginpartnership.org/learning-go](https://elginpartnership.org/learning-go).

## Daily Herald

### How COVID-19 pandemic reshaped school districts across the suburbs --- 7/02/2022

By Jake Griffin



Schools such as Brook Forest Elementary in Oak Brook had to make adjustments to class sizes during the COVID-19 pandemic, requiring many to increase staffing despite enrollment declines over the past several years. *Brian Hill | Staff Photographer, 2020*

In any other year, a decline of nearly 1,350 students might have resulted in less staff at Elgin Area School District U-46 schools.

But 2021 wasn't just any other year, thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"They survived some pretty trying times, and I'm including everyone," said **U-46 Superintendent Tony Sanders**. "This was something that was unprecedented in our lifetimes."

Among 103 suburban school districts in Cook, DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry and Will counties, more than half added full-time educators and other certified staff members for the 2020-2021 school year, even though roughly 80% reported fewer students from the year before.

Combined, the 103 districts reported 14,201 fewer students for the school year that ended in 2021 than the year that ended in 2020. However, those districts combined to add 650 full-time "certificated employees."

That's according to a Daily Herald analysis of enrollment and staffing figures provided by the districts to the Illinois State Board of Education through mandated Annual Statement of Affairs reports for the 2020 and 2021 fiscal years.

Data from the school year that just ended -- fiscal year 2022 -- won't be available until December, state education officials said.

"Nobody could have predicted what was going to happen at the end of 2020," said Terri McHugh, executive director of community relations at Schaumburg Township Elementary District 54. "We had budgeted for a reduction in staff before the pandemic. But things obviously changed."

District 54 reported nearly 750 fewer students in 2021 but added five full-time educators as the district dealt with mandates for smaller class sizes to meet social distancing requirements and virtual learning programs for students who couldn't, or wouldn't, attend in-person classes.

### **'Two different student populations'**

Many districts began the 2020-2021 school year with virtual learning options or hybrid-learning plans, where students spent alternating days or weeks going to class in-person or online at home.

"It was like we had almost two different student populations," said Itasca Elementary District 10 Superintendent Craig Benes. "Our board wanted to provide a choice for families."

District 10 added 10 full-time certified staff members in 2021 even though it had 3% fewer students from the prior school year.

### **Meeting staffing challenges**

School district officials said they dealt with staffing challenges in a number of ways. In many instances, full-time nonteaching positions were cut to free up money for additional teachers. A number of part-time positions also were eliminated to create full-time posts.

District officials reported a greater need for non-classroom professionals as well.

"We wanted to make sure we had enough social workers, psychologists and counselors because student needs are a lot different nowadays," said Peter Gill, a spokesman at Mundelein Elementary District 75.

## **Costs and benefits**

According to the 103 districts' Annual Financial Reports filed with ISBE, the cost of salaries and benefits rose at 85 of the 103 districts from 2020 to 2021 by a combined \$133,897,366.

Contractual requirements account for some of that increase, district officials are quick to note, but the additional staffing also helped grow labor costs.

Fortunately, much of those additional costs were offset by federal pandemic-related grant fund reimbursements.

According to ISBE officials, the 851 Illinois school districts are eligible for more than \$7 billion in federal pandemic-related grants. Districts must apply for the reimbursements by the end of September 2024.

"I wish we had more time to spend down those funds, but we've put a plan together in the time allowed," Sanders said. "I think our kids learned a lot during the pandemic, but there was ground that was lost both academically and socially or emotionally that is not going to be made up in one year."

**U-46**, the state's second-largest school district, is eligible for more than \$102 million in federal pandemic-related grant reimbursements, according to ISBE records. The district has received roughly a quarter of that so far.

Officials at many suburban school districts report staffing challenges in the wake of the pandemic. Teachers that might have normally stuck around for a few years despite maxing out their retirement benefits are opting out, while other educators are leaving earlier than expected.

The labor shortage in some districts has translated to savings for taxpayers.

"We ended the year with an unexpected surplus because we didn't have the normal costs we might have, so we reduced registration fees and we're preparing a property tax abatement to help soften the blow for some of our residents," said Huntley Community School District 158 Superintendent Scott Rowe.

But there are some additional costs being incurred as well. Finding substitute teachers also has been difficult.

"We were already paying the second-highest rate in DuPage County for our subs, but we still had to raise it," said David Hill, superintendent at Carol Stream Elementary District 93.

## **Declining enrollments**

Hill's district was one of the few in the suburbs that saw a decline in enrollment, full-time staffing and personnel costs from 2020 to 2021.

District 93 saw a nearly 6% decline in enrollment from 2020 to 2021 and reported 12 fewer full-time certified staff members during that time as well.

There's a national trend in declining enrollment in recent years, but Hill believes many districts saw steeper than normal dips because of the pandemic.

Many parents chose home-schooling or sent their children to private schools where mask mandates were often looser or not enforced.

Barrington Unit District 220 reported a 6.8% drop in enrollment from 2020 to 2021, which translated to 602 fewer students.

"We sent a survey to all families who have exited seeking the reason why," said Melissa Byrne, District 220's assistant superintendent for teaching and learning. "We hope to see more of those families coming back."

## **By the numbers: Some key figures about suburban school district staffing, enrollment and personnel costs during the pandemic**

103: Suburban school districts analyzed

80: Districts reporting enrollment declines from 2020 to 2021

14,201: Fewer students in the 103 districts combined

57: Districts reporting more certified employees from 2020 to 2021

10: Districts reporting same number of certified employees for both years

656: Net increase of certified employees in the 103 districts combined

\$133,897,366: Additional personnel costs of 103 districts combined in 2021

\$7,065,012,859: Federal pandemic grants Illinois' 851 school districts are eligible to receive

Source: Illinois State Board of Education



# Daily Herald

## Bartlett community turns out for Sunday afternoon Fourth of July parade --- 7/03/2022

Daily Herald report



Mila Volant, 3, of Crystal Lake dances as the Bartlett High School band marches by during the Bartlett Lions Club Fourth of July parade Sunday. Her dad, Mike, is pictured at left. *Rick West | Staff Photographer*

The Bartlett Lions Club Fourth of July parade marched around town Sunday afternoon.

Children lined the streets and enjoyed treats as the parade started near downtown, proceeded through it and south down to Stearns Road. The **Bartlett High School** band played and the school's dance team performed.

Civil War reenactors even were greeted by a "Star Wars" stormtrooper.

The parade also featured horses, floats, fire engines, bands, Shriners, community groups and more.