

Press Clippings 08/14/21- 08/16/21

---Daily Herald---08/15/2021

What suburbs' schools are doing to combat the pandemic learning slide
by Madhu Krishnamurthy



Students at Grant High School in Fox Lake had their first day of in-person classes Wednesday. Districts across the suburbs are increasing academic and mental health supports for students coming off a pandemic school year. *John Starks | Staff Photographer*

Tony Sanders, superintendent of the state's second-largest school district, said from the start the COVID-19 pandemic would change schools forever.

It did.

In Sanders' **Elgin Area School District U-46** and other suburban school districts, students this year will be greeted by more team learning, social workers, interventionists, psychologists, counselors and instructional coaches, and an increased focus on social-emotional needs and teacher training.

Educators trying to mitigate some of the pandemic's impact on learning are providing additional academic and mental health supports this fall to help students get caught up and reintegrate into classroom settings.

Several suburban districts offered virtual and in-person summer camps, classes, and academic enrichment and bridge programs to stave off learning loss. As full-day, in-person classes for all students resume, administrators are taking lessons learned from teaching during the pandemic to develop better supports for students and teachers this school year.

"I wrote back in the early days of the pandemic that if public education looks the same after the pandemic as it did before, then we have failed," Sanders said.

Classes resume Monday for U-46's more than 37,000 students.

This school year, the district is launching U-46 Rising, a learning model focused on improving core instruction through the use of student-led academic teaming. Teams of two to five students will work toward a common academic goal with minimal teacher guidance using clear protocols for standards-based learning.

In the first phase, teachers and administrators will be trained on the new practices for students and teachers to gauge progress and learning. Students will learn how to set their own learning targets, self-assess and track progress, and support peers.

Five district elementary schools -- Creekside, Channing, Laurel Hill, Parkwood and Willard -- have been designated "Schools for Rigor and Equity" and will serve as pilot sites for the program. They will receive additional support from leadership and instructional coaches and free before- and after-school child care for families.

The program will be rolled out districtwide over several years.

An Illinois State Board of Education [study](#) on how student learning has changed since schools first suspended in-person instruction in March 2020 shows the greatest impact was to students' social-emotional skills and mental health.

"When we return for the 2021-22 school year, we must meet students where they are and understand they will be different upon their return after the traumatic experience of being relatively isolated for more than a year," the report reads.

Schools have reported the youngest learners are seeing the greatest slippage in language and social skills so critical in those formative years. They also are likely to see a disproportionate impact on students of color and students with disabilities.

Social and emotional learning was a key aspect of summer programs and will continue to be a focus this fall, educators say.

Des Plaines Elementary District 62 officials have identified hundreds of students and families needing social-emotional learning and/or mental health supports, including nonclinical and clinical services, said Ellen Swanson, district assistant superintendent for student services.

A majority of the district's roughly 4,800 students return to school Wednesday.

Swanson said the district will use federal funds to offer those social-emotional supports and services this school year and next in partnership with the Kenneth Young Center, a community-based behavioral health organization.

The center's employees will provide nonclinical services, including home visits, homework help or tutoring, mentoring, connecting families to community resources, and training district staff members on compassion as well as pandemic fatigue and self-care. Students and families also will have access to clinical and counseling services.

District 62 also will provide supports to mitigate pandemic "learning slide" in reading and mathematics.

"We have updated our intervention approaches and invested in ongoing guidance and training for our skilled interventionists in both reading and math," said Laura Sangroula, district assistant superintendent for instructional services.

Glenbard Township High School District 87 is launching a new virtual tutoring program this school year to help students with English and math. The district's roughly 8,000 students returned to classrooms Wednesday.

Students can access tutors on three nights each week via Zoom, in addition to existing in-school and after-school academic supports, Superintendent David Larson said.

"Also, we hired four additional social workers to support students who may need emotional support as a result of the pandemic," Larson said.

Many districts still are assessing performance gaps.

"While 'learning loss' is a term being utilized, it gives the impression that students went backward in their learning in 2020-21, which is not accurate," said Susan Savage, assistant superintendent for instruction for Elk Grove Township Elementary District 59. "Students clearly learned last year but not at the levels most districts are used to seeing. (We) are focusing on how best to accelerate learning now that students are fully back in-person."

Classes began Wednesday for the district's roughly 6,400 students.

Students and families will receive a variety of supports, including differentiated universal instruction, group and individual intervention, and in-home resources for students to supplement learning, Savage said.

"Right now, we are emphasizing practices that are culturally responsive and trauma-informed to meet diverse needs in all classrooms, within our social-emotional instruction," she said.

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**Elgin barbers offer free dos to students
by Madhu Krishnamurthy**



Wilbur Dumas, Jr., 37, of Elgin, left, cuts the hair of Jose Gomez. Dumas, a product of the Boys and Girls Club of Elgin and a graduate of Larkin High School in Elgin, and other Elgin barbers will provide free back-to-school haircuts Sunday to underprivileged students. *Courtesy of Wilbur Dumas*

Several Elgin barbers will come together to provide free back-to-school haircuts to **Elgin-area students** in need Sunday.

Haircuts are available on a walk-in basis from noon to 5 p.m. at the Boys & Girls Club of Elgin, 355 Dundee Ave., Elgin.

"I have at least 12 barbers who are willing to help out," said Wilbur Dumas Jr., who opened a barbershop in Elgin because he wanted to give back to the community."

Sunday's event exclusively will cater to underprivileged kids who live in the area of the club, he added.

Dumas said volunteers will cut hair for "as many (kids) as we can take ... there is no limit at all. We're trying to take care of everybody."

Classes begin Monday for more than 37,000 Elgin Area School District U-46 students.

Dumas, 37, is a product of the Boys and Girls Club of Elgin and a graduate of Larkin High School in Elgin. He started Lincoln Avenue Barbershop four years ago with little money in his pocket.

Today, it is a bustling operation with six barbers -- three Black, two Puerto Rican, and one Asian American -- who grew up in the community with Dumas. The shop moved into a new, larger downtown location in April.

Dumas volunteers at the Boys and Girls Club and teaches part-time at the Cosmetology and Spa Academy in Elgin. He has been offering free haircuts to Boys and Girls Club members at the barber school throughout the pandemic.

He will be leading the effort Sunday along with barbers from Fade Stars Barbershop and In The Cut Hair Studios, both of Elgin, and his barber school students.

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**Free school supplies handed out at back-to-school bash
by Mark Welsh**



Isabel Perez, 12, of Elgin, picks up a free backpack filled with school supplies at Elgin's fourth annual Back to School BBQ Bash Saturday in Wing Park. *Mark Welsh | Staff Photographer*

Cars lined up for hours even before Elgin's fourth annual Back to School BBQ Bash started Saturday in Wing Park.

Organizers handed out free backpacks filled with school supplies like notebooks, pencils, pens, and a free bag lunch with a hot dog or pulled pork sandwich provided by Food For Friends of Chicago.

"I feel it's good for the community and it's a good thing to get free stuff, especially school supplies," said Isabel Perez, 12, of Elgin, as she picked up her new book bag. She will be attending **Larsen Middle School** starting Monday.

---Daily Herald---08/14/2021

Girls golf: Scouting the Fox Valley

by Kevin McGavin, Daily Herald Correspondent



St. Charles North's Catie Nekola is one of the top returning players in the area this fall. *Rick West | Staff Photographer*

Illinois' prep athletic landscape was undeniably altered by the pandemic.

As the local girls golf season commences, there are lingering issues surrounding the sport directly related to the relaxation of safety protocols.

"We are struggling looking for a course," Batavia coach Tim Kauffmann said of securing practice and dual-match facilities.

"We don't even have a course to practice on," Geneva senior star Reese Clark said. "I don't blame the courses; they have to protect their members."

But there is also a sense the contingency plans and alternative arrangements the pandemic engendered will be greatly eased this fall.

Clark, for example, will not have to contend with widely different conditions in attempting to unseat Catie Nekola, the last link to the 2018 Class 2A state-championship St. Charles North team, like was the case a year ago when the DuKane Conference tournament was held on separate days.

The four local members of the DuKane Conference -- Batavia, Geneva and the two St. Charles high schools -- as well as its twin individual faces -- Clark and Nekola -- have renewed hope for normalcy with the return of a state tournament.

"They are both great players, and I would love to see our kids push them," St. Charles East coach Jared Gutesha said of Clark and Nekola.

The Saints (324), with their top four of Allison Edgar, Emily Charles, Ella Tassone and Abby Buechele, began their season with a runner-up finish to a powerful Barrington squad at the Broncos' Invitational on Thursday.

Charles and Edgar fired respective rounds of 76 and 77 for St. Charles East.

"We have all but one of our team back from last year," Gutesha said. "We should be a very competitive team this year."

In addition to Clark, Geneva will counter its opponents with Rosa Demory, Sydney Cournaya and Nora Novak.

Clark is adamant not to turn the season into a referendum on her three-year individual battle with Nekola.

The two seniors are both ranked in the top-five in the state.

"Catie and I are definitely friends," Clark said. "We are paired together all the time. We have the same swing coach (Pat Lenski). We have similar games."

Kauffmann will seek to make league inroads behind Kylie Sloan, Brooke Miara, Lauren Sudler and Amanda Naylor.

"We will be in the middle of the pack," Kauffmann said.

In the Fox Valley, there does not appear to be a clear-cut favorite.

"Inexperience is something we will have, but I look for the girls to improve this fall," Jacobs coach Paul Anderson said.

Anderson is hopeful seniors Autumn Kovach and Lana Tousey will be exceptions.

Burlington Central senior Maya Gusciora was sixth at the league tournament last fall; coach Kyle Nelson echoed Anderson.

"We are not returning four of our top five golfers from last year and have a very young roster," Nelson said.

The Rockets, the defending champion, have junior McKenna Berglind and freshman Natalia Gusciora to augment the latter's older sister.

Cary-Grove, Crystal Lake South and Crystal Lake Central cannot be dismissed as the schools form a co-op.

C-G underclassmen Delaney Medlyn and Estrella Bernal should see plenty of action.

"They want to work hard and get better," co-op coach Kyle McCaughn said.

Dundee-Crown coach Emma Ageneau has a true elder statesman in senior Sonora Rodriguez; Magen Laas, Sophie Morawski and Taylor Fleury all figure to receive a baptism by fire as Charger underclassmen.

The five U-46 high schools -- Bartlett, Elgin, Larkin, South Elgin and Streamwood -- will compete as a single program in the Upstate Eight Conference under the tutelage of Storm PE teacher Tanner Gardon.

Kaneland will have a full-fledged program for a second straight year as junior Katharine Marshall led the Knights to an Interstate Eight Conference championship last fall.

For the three single-A Catholic schools, St. Edward senior Ivy Burnett is one to watch.

"We have five girls in the program, and Ivy is head and shoulders above all of them," St. Edward coach Paul Netzel said.

Rosary began its season in an auspicious manner on Thursday; the triumvirate of Morgan Witte, Brooke Stumm and Molly Reagan paced the Royals' admirable sixth-place finish at Plainfield North.

Michelle Beggs is the most decorated player in Aurora Central Catholic program history.

---ABC-7 Eyewitness News report---08/16/2021
Elgin School District U46 faces staff shortages as students return to class Monday
by Maher Kawash

<https://abc7chicago.com/back-to-school-elgin-district-u46/10954417/>

ELGIN, Ill. (WLS) -- Students at School District U46 in Elgin make a long-awaited return to the classroom Monday, but this year comes with some staffing challenges.

The school district is the second largest in Illinois. COVID safety protocols are in place, including a mask requirement as part of Governor JB Pritzker's executive order.

The district has partnered with the University of Illinois to test unvaccinated students,

teachers and staff members. Parents are encouraged to get their students vaccinated as soon as they're eligible.

The return to the classroom full time also comes with some hurdles as the district is facing a number of shortages with staff and bus drivers.

The district's director of transportation said a number of drivers recently retired.

Superintendent Tony Sanders said the district has about 90 teaching positions to fill, caused by a combination of retirements & lowering class size for COVID restrictions.

"We'll be calling in retirees, we'll be asking all our daily subs to step into classrooms [and] non-traditional teachers who may not be in a classroom may be asked to help," Sanders said.

The district is also looking for more speech therapists, nurses, occupational therapists and school psychologists.

This is the first time these students are all going to be back in class together since March of 2020, so the district is asking parents to be patient as they settle in this first week.

Students in several other local school districts are heading back to the classroom Monday. It's the first day of school for Thornton Township, Schaumburg and Oak Park River Forest.