

Press Clippings 08/18/21

---Elgin Courier-News---08/18/2021

Keeping up with Jones

by Paul Johnson for Beacon News

When senior Jordan Jones lines up under center as **South Elgin's** quarterback, he immediately, instinctively and understandably looks for his twin brother Jalen.

"In youth football," Jordan Jones said, "I used to just drop back and heave it up for him."

That scenario could play out again for the Storm. After earning all-state recognition during the shortened spring season for his play at safety, Jordan Jones will line up all over the field this fall for South Elgin.

This season, he'll take snaps at quarterback along with sophomore Jacob Sullivan while also seeing time as a slot receiver and returning kicks. And he hopes to dominate at his future college position in the secondary. As a defensive back, going up against his brother Jalen is actually helping him get better.

"I always compete with him and make sure he's staying on top of his stuff," Jordan Jones said. "He makes sure I'm staying on my stuff. Iron sharpens iron and we make each other better."

South Elgin coach Dragan Teonic raved about the twins, both of whom will play key roles for the Storm on offense and defense.

"The thing about both Jones brothers is they're both very athletic but they're football kids," Teonic said. "They love the game. They're both still physically maturing, so I really think their best football is maybe two or three years down the road from now."

The offensive skills for Jordan Jones will grab headlines. But he doesn't care if that means he's calling the shots or catching the passes from Sullivan.

"I'll work my best at every position," Jones said. "I can help out as much as I can for the team."

His work defensively, however, is what Teonic believes will attract colleges.

"His range is incredible," Teonic said of Jones. "He's physical. He's just really, really smooth, great ball skills. It's what you look for."

Jones credited his background playing quarterback for helping him excel in the defensive backfield.

“I can read the quarterback,” Jones said. “I kind of know reading his eyes what he wants to do. That kind of helps me out. Just my speed to get to the ball and rally to the ball with my teammates, coming downhill, is my strength.”

Teonic is looking forward to Jones showing off his full arsenal for college coaches. Jones’ recruiting has been slower than Teonic would like, but that could change with a big season.

“He’s in many ways still a young man physically,” Teonic said. “But he’s getting stronger and he’s starting to fill out now. Someone is going to get an unbelievable kid.”

Now that practice has started and opening night is in sight, Jones is going to let that process play out naturally.

“I don’t think about that when I’m on the field,” Jones said. “That’s something that happens when I’m by myself. I just provide as much as I can for my team. That’s more personal and I leave that off the field.”

Jones is ready for the workload with South Elgin coming off a 5-0 spring season. With practice in full bloom and things getting closer to back to normal, he’s ready to show that the spring was no fluke.

“We look really good, especially on the defensive side,” Jones said. “Last season, no playoffs, we’re coming out here hungry to prove a point that we went undefeated and we can do it again.”

---The Examiner of Bartlett ---08/18/2021

Student Code of Conduct changes await U-46 vote

by Seth Hancock

Note: This story also ran in The Examiner of South Elgin and in The Examiner of Streamwood

Superintendent Tony Sanders admitted that **School District U-46** likely has little power to discipline students for not wearing face masks in a memo to the Board of Education at its Monday, Aug. 9 meeting.

Changes to the Student Code of Conduct were presented, with a board vote expected on Aug. 23. The code makes efforts in expressing a desire not to discipline students generally, including changing the phrase “student discipline” to “culture and climate” throughout, but officials expressed their desires to punish children for not wearing a face mask.

In an email, board member Kate Thommes said the code should not be objective but rather “general” and asked if it gives “us authority to discipline students who refuse to wear masks?”

Sanders responded that the “disruptive clothing or appearance” infraction includes “explicit references to a health threat” which “should suffice for addressing the majority of mask-wearing incidents.” It also includes a “non-compliance with staff directive” infraction which replaces the “defiance/disrespect/insubordination/no n-compliance” infraction.

However, Sanders wrote there “may be difficulty with the level of response applied” with only level 1/2 responses allowed, which are teacher level responses.

“This may not suffice for continued or intentional non-compliance,” Sanders wrote. “Our Legal Office is working to provide guidance to administrators and teachers for addressing mask non-compliance.”

Level 1 includes disciplines from warning to restorative circle/conference/conversation. Level 2 ranges from parent/guardian accompanies child to class to parking permit revocation.

A memo from Robin Barraza, coordinator of culture and climate, stated changes include updates to pronouns “from gender specific to ‘they’ and ‘their’ throughout” while it removes the “Individuals with Disabilities Act” regarding protecting student rights changing it with “state and federal law.”

Sanders said “it actually expands it to incorporate all state and federal laws” when asked by board member Dawn Martin.

From the “District U-46 Does Not” page of the code, it removes language that the district won’t “share individual student information with any other person than the student and parent guardian in accordance with Board Policy and state law,” Barraza stating “as it is not an accurate description of our practice.”

The implication is the district does “share individual student information” beyond the students/parents. The code removes the “disrespect towards others” infraction which board member Melissa Owens questioned. Barraza said it’s “redundant” as its “included in the infraction of ‘defiance/disrespect/insubordination/noncompliance,’” which is also being removed.

---The Examiner of Bartlett---08/18/2021

Expenditure proposals slated for U-46 board vote

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** is set to vote on \$659,674 in expenditure proposals at its upcoming meeting on Monday, Aug. 23.

The items were presented on Aug. 9. Included was a \$494,348 proposal, paid from the operations and maintenance fund if approved, with F.H. Paschen to replace an emergency exit staircase on the west side of Elgin High School.

“Those stairs have exposed rebar and are showing significant signs of atrophy, which is allowing water to seep beneath them into an interior storage room,” the proposal states. “Although the concrete has been patched multiple times, the stairs have deteriorated beyond Plant Operations’ repair capabilities.”

The district is asking for \$108,000 (education fund) with Northern Illinois University (NIU) to “strategically build a leadership pipeline through their Principal Preparation Program,” the

proposal states. Taxpayers will pay for the tuition and a “paid residency for the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 school years” and the “resident administrator must commit to serving as a site-based administrator in U-46 for 5 years.”

“The goal for the 2021-2022 school year is to identify up to six elementary school sites that will host a ‘resident administrator,’” the proposal states. “The resident administrator will take on a similar role to an assistant principal, and will learn from the host principal as they work in their buildings and simultaneously pursue a master’s degree in educational leadership from NIU.”

For Microsoft Dynamics GP2016 software, the district is asking for \$30,431 (education fund) with Unified Business Solutions. The software is used for purchasing and financial operations department reports. The district is also asking for \$26,895 (education fund) for a three-year contract with SchoolMint which “provides a digital platform” for “a lottery system to manage admission into the Magnet Academies,” the proposal states.

---Crain’s Chicago Business--08/18/2021

With school less than two weeks away, CPS still hasn’t picked a leader

by Mila Koumpilova for Chalkbeat Chicago

August 17, 2021 09:07 PM UPDATED 3 HOURS AGO



Stacey Rupolo/Chalkbeat

Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot has pledged a transparent process for selecting the next CEO for Chicago Public Schools.

When Chicago Public Schools launched its search for a new CEO, city officials set an ambitious goal of naming a top district leader by the end of July — ideally someone who could take over before the new school year.

That didn't happen. With less than two weeks before school starts, interim CEO José Torres remains in charge.

Mayor Lori Lightfoot also pledged a process with an unprecedented level of transparency. Yet it has been more than six weeks since any public update on the search, despite a promise of biweekly reports.

Chicago parents, educators and leaders are intensely focused on the pressing task of safely reopening schools for mandatory, full-time in-person learning, as district and teachers union officials remain caught up in yet another round of contentious school reopening negotiations. This might be a fraught moment to announce a new school chiefs pick. In a statement, Cesar Rodriguez, a press secretary in mayor Lori Lightfoot's office, said the city is focused on getting the high-stakes search right.

"The education of CPS students is our highest priority," Rodriguez said. "We are taking this decision carefully, and at this time the search for a new CEO for CPS is still underway."

School district CEO selections in the city have traditionally taken place behind closed doors and often produced leaders without a deep education background. This time, by contrast, the city has opted for a national search and has enlisted educators and community members to serve on the search committee charged with selecting finalists.

Still, the city should honor its promise to keep district parents and employees in the loop, said David Greising, CEO of the Better Government Association, a nonprofit focused on public accountability. (Greising is also a contributing columnist for Crain's.)

"When you make a commitment to communicate regularly, and you don't live up to it, that's a problem," he said.

Chicago launched a national search for a new schools chief last spring after then-CEO Janice Jackson — citing the intense pressures of steering the district through the pandemic and an acrimonious reopening standoff — announced she would step down at the end of June.

The city set an aggressive timeline, with plans to announce Lightfoot's pick for new CEO during the final week of July. In the meantime, it brought on Torres, the former Elgin superintendent who had recently retired as president of the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy in Aurora, to serve in an interim role.

The mayor promised public engagement and transparency in selecting the schools chief. But Chicago Public Schools has not responded to repeated requests to share the names of the employees and community members who served on a search committee charged with selecting frontrunners for the job. The district did not make finalist identities public, citing the need to protect applicants' confidentiality.

And although the district and its search firm promised biweekly updates on the search would be regularly posted online, the last time such a report was shared publicly was on June 23. That update outlined the search firm's process for soliciting public input into the experience

and qualities the next schools chief should have, through a survey and a series of focus groups.

On a call with reporters late last week, Chicago Teachers Union President Jesse Sharkey said he does not know where the search process stands but does not think its timeline will affect negotiations to sign a reopening agreement with the district.

“When they make a permanent appointment, we will work with this person,” he said. “But the mayor is still the person who calls shots at CPS.”

The new CEO will take over as the country’s third largest district reopens for full-time in-person learning after 15 months of virtual learning for most students and sets out to address the academic and social-emotional fallout from the pandemic. That leader will have a lot to tackle, from striking a more collaborative tone with the teachers union to addressing declining enrollment. There’s also the newly signed law that establishes school board elections starting in 2024, a blow to the mayor’s influence and reach when it comes to education policy.

The city signed on with Illinois-based search firm BWP and Associates to lead the search. The opening drew 25 applications by its June deadline. BWP vetted the candidates and forwarded a list of frontrunners to a district search committee made up of school board members, employees, and residents, tasked with selecting finalists to be interviewed by Lightfoot and board President Miguel del Valle.

Lightfoot had stressed that Torres would not be in the running for the permanent position, saying he already had plans for his retirement when the district persuaded him to step in temporarily.

Despite the expectation that he would be in the job briefly, the district paid Torres a \$5,000 bonus to move to Chicago and committed to providing subsidized housing or chipping in \$3,000 a month for housing expenses. Torres’ salary is \$335,000 a year — \$35,000 more than Jackson made after the district gave her a \$40,000 raise last winter.

In August, Torres hired a chief portfolio officer away from the state’s second largest district, raising questions about whether he foresees a longer tenure. Ushma Shah, formerly the assistant superintendent of elementary schools for **Elgin U-46**, took the job on an interim basis. She served as Elgin’s chief equity officer under Torres.

Greising said Lightfoot deserves credit for embracing a more open and systematic approach to selecting a schools chief than her predecessors. In former district CEOs such as Barbara Byrd-Bennett, convicted for steering no-bid contracts to associates, Lightfoot had cautionary tales about relying on a closed-door appointment, he said. But, he said, “Being systematic and being transparent are both important.”

Greising questioned the decision not to name two or more finalists for the job, which can help generate important public input and vetting. He said he understands disclosing finalists can discourage some candidates from applying for the job because they don’t want to appear disloyal to their current employer. However, given the prestige of being a top contender for “one of the most important public education jobs in the country,” he voiced skepticism that many applicants would be turned off.

And, he said, even during a hectic, eventful stretch for the district, there's no reason to hold off on updating the public about the search: "I am not sure that waiting for a calm time in Chicago Public Schools is a winning strategy."

Cassie Walker Burke contributed to this report.

---Patch--08/18/2021

Remote learning options for Illinois students are slim as school districts enter new year

by Samantha Smylie and Maia Spoto for Chalkbeat Chicago

Posted Aug. 17, 2021 at 1:39 p.m. CT

As Illinois school districts prepare to reopen for classes, many are grappling with how to offer remote learning for students with medical conditions and other learning needs while following a state board of education resolution mandating in-person learning this fall.

Some of the state's largest school districts such as Chicago Public Schools and Elgin's U-46 are creating virtual academies for medically fragile students. Springfield School District 186 is allowing students with medical conditions to apply for remote learning, while Rockford School District 205 is only offering in-person learning.

Last school year, Illinois districts shifted from in-person learning to remote learning as COVID-19 cases spiked. Many landed on a hybrid learning model that gave families the option to send students into classrooms for a few days a week or to remain at home. In some cases, districts remained closed for the entire year.

This year, however, both the state and federal governments are pressuring school districts to fully reopen in the fall. In Illinois, the state board has made it clear that schools must be in-person with limited opportunities for remote learning.

The state board of education is leaning heavily on masks to make reopening schools work and keep quarantining unvaccinated students to a minimum. State schools chief Carmen Ayala recently wrote a letter to superintendents statewide warning that any school district failing to implement the mask mandate will lose state recognition. That would result in losing state funding and access to sport associations.

"We know that consistent and correct mask use is the simplest, most effective way to keep students safely in school, where they can learn and grow to their fullest potential," Ayala said in the letter.

Timothy Christian Schools, a private school in Elmhurst, lost state recognition earlier this month for not implementing a mask mandate. The state recently reversed its decision last week after the school said it will comply with the state's mandate.

In addition to masks, the state's school code allows local school boards to adopt a remote learning plan and, with the consent of a parent or guardian, provide it to students based on their learning needs. Schools around the state have taken different approaches to this option.

Elgin's U-46, the second largest school district in the state, has a Distance Learning Academy for unvaccinated students with medical conditions that increase risk of serious complications related to COVID-19. Students must submit documentation from a medical professional and a parent or guardian must provide a statement on the medical condition.

The district says that slightly more than 100 students applied for the distance learning academy by the deadline in early June and about two dozen students will participate starting Aug. 16, the district's first day of school. Students will be assigned a full-time distance learning teacher who will provide live instruction each day.

Springfield School District 186, with over 13,400 students making it one of the largest school districts in the state, plans to reopen school buildings to students on Sept. 2. As in Elgin, the district will require parents to apply for remote instruction through a "medical certification for home/ hospital instruction" form.

To qualify, students must have a mental or physical medical condition that qualifies them to be temporarily educated away from a school building by a qualified teacher. The school district requires a physician to complete the form with a specific diagnosis.

The district is still registering students and doesn't have a total of how many students will receive this exemption.

Rockford School District 205, the third largest school district in the state, has yet to finalize its back-to-school plans. At the moment, Rockford, which starts classes on Sept. 2, is only offering in-person learning.

Chicago Public Schools has doubled down on its commitment to limit virtual learning, but some parents there are pushing for a remote. Preliminary reports showed uptake was low for the district's Virtual Academy, which will only serve medically fragile students next year.

Many parents whose students are eligible for the Virtual Academy aren't enrolling their children because their questions about the academy have gone unanswered, while others whose students aren't eligible for the Virtual Academy are interested in enrolling their children.

A petition posted last week by parent advocacy group Raise Your Hand in favor of expanded virtual learning has garnered over 1,000 signatures so far.

"There's a growing sentiment from families all over the state that a remote option is necessary, at least for the first quarter, until the littlest can get vaccinated and families can feel safer," Raise Your Hand organizer Cassandra Kaczocha said in a Wednesday meeting with parents and reporters.

The district has not yet released clear guidance on whether it will close classrooms exposed to COVID-19 or require teachers to do double-duty teaching both students in a classroom and students via screens, a practice the city's teachers union firmly criticizes.

---Daily Herald---08/18/2021
Neighbors in the News
by Norrine Twohey

Posted 8/18/2021 6:00 AM

Jan Leasure, division president of Diamond Residential Mortgage in Libertyville, was recognized among the top 1% of mortgage originators in the United States. The Top 1% accolade was published in the summer 2021 issue of "Mortgage Executive."

To qualify, originators must close more than \$30 million in loans in a 12-month period, with those numbers coming solely from their own production and not through office assistants.

Leasure previously spent two decades teaching junior high, then 10 as a college instructor. She also worked as a licensed Realtor for 10 years and wrote a syndicated column called \$uper \$aver for 25.

"It was such a difficult year for everyone," Leasure said of 2020, the year for which she was recognized. "I was shocked to receive notice of the Top 1 % honor."

- College of DuPage student Thomas Oleksy of Hanover Park was named a 2021 Coca-Cola Leaders of Promise Scholar. One of only 200 Phi Theta Kappa members nationwide to earn this honor, Oleksy will receive a \$1,000 scholarship.

The Coca-Cola Leaders of Promise Scholarship Program helps new Phi Theta Kappa members defray educational expenses while enrolled in associate degree programs. Scholars are selected based on scholastic achievement, community service and leadership potential.

Oleksy left a 30-year career in the service industry to enroll in classes at COD to study marketing, management and accounting. After graduating with his Associate of Applied Science degree next spring, he hopes to work in the human resources field.

- Dr. Shobhit Minhas, a fellowship trained hand and wrist orthopedic surgeon, has joined the team of physicians at Fox Valley Orthopedics. He will see patients at Fox Valley Orthopedics' Algonquin, Barrington and Elgin locations.

Dr. Minhas received a Doctor of Medicine degree from Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, Chicago, and completed his residency at NYU Langone Medical Center/Hospital for Joint Diseases, New York.

He is a Fellow at the Washington University/Barnes-Jewish Hospital, and a member of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, American Society of Surgery of the Hand and Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Medical Society.

- Art Fessler has returned to Elgin Area School District U-46 to serve as the interim principal of Eastview Middle School in Bartlett for the 2021-22 school year.

Fessler, who began his teaching career in U-46 as a teacher at Elgin's Grand Elementary School, most recently served for eight years as superintendent of Elk Grove Township School District 59.

Prior to that, he served as superintendent of Oak Lawn-Hometown District 123 from 2010 to 2013. Before becoming a superintendent, he worked for Barrington Public Schools as a middle school principal and assistant superintendent over middle and high schools.

Fessler holds a bachelor's degree in elementary education from Judson University, a master's degree in curriculum and instruction from Concordia University, and a doctoral degree from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.