

Press Clippings 09/01/2021

---Daily Herald--09/01/2021

Many suburban school districts hit with bus driver shortage by Madhu Krishnamurthy



Woodland District 50 is among many suburban school districts scrambling for bus drivers this school year. *Mick Zawislak | Staff Photographer*

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Suburban school districts are being hit by a nationwide shortage of school bus drivers, exacerbated by an unrelenting COVID-19 pandemic that has created a scarcity of workers in many areas of the economy.

The situation in the suburbs is not yet as dire as that in Chicago -- where last week, 10% of Chicago Public Schools' bus drivers quit, prompting CPS to offer to pay parents to get their children to school by themselves -- several districts are struggling to recruit and retain bus drivers, a recurring problem even before the pandemic.

Elgin Area School District U-46 officials, for instance, say they are looking to hire at least 30 more bus drivers -- on top of the 300 they employ already, including retirees who are filling in where needed.

"Our bus drivers play a vital role in keeping our schools open," Superintendent Tony Sanders wrote in a message to families in the state's second-largest school district.

Other suburban districts report similar problems finding bus drivers, with some districts offering incentives to new hires.

State health and education officials removed capacity limits on school buses with the switch to full in-person learning this year. Students and bus drivers still have to wear face masks, but there is no 3-foot social distancing requirement on buses.

Many suburban parents have taken to social media to complain about crowding on buses that they say aren't properly ventilated with barely any social distancing between students, creating the potential for the virus spreading.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Illinois Department of Public Health define an outbreak as two or more linked positive cases that are not from the same household and not listed as close contacts outside the outbreak setting.

Most school districts have contact tracing procedures in place and monitor positive cases and exposures daily of students, teachers and employees.

U-46 officials said they haven't seen any positive COVID-19 cases related to busing, but one classroom at Streamwood High School has been closed through Sept. 7 per health department guidance. Officials said they are seeing a "high level of compliance" with COVID-19 mitigation strategies, but expect to see more cases in a district educating more than 37,000 students.

"We are not seeing new COVID infections or exposure that we can attribute to our buses and have had no notable issues involving our buses," said Erin Holmes, spokeswoman for

Palatine-Schaumburg Township High School District 211. "However, since there is no way to discern for certain where an individual may have contracted the virus, we would not know what percentage occurred related to busing."

Palatine Township Elementary District 15 uses seating charts both in school and on buses to help expedite contact tracing and to identify students who need to quarantine or isolate. Parents also must self-certify that their children are free of COVID-19 symptoms and fever before getting on a bus.

Schaumburg Township Elementary District 54 is tracking COVID-19 cases and contacts among its students based on parent notifications, students becoming ill during the school day and the ability to identify areas of contact with reported positive cases. While there are examples of such cases or contacts occurring on school buses, the individual data is not consolidated in a way to show the overall percentage occurring there, spokeswoman Terri McHugh said.

Like many districts, Northwest Suburban High School District 214's website includes a daily tracker of active COVID-19 cases and actively quarantined people at each of its six high schools and the Forest View Education Center. But the tracker doesn't include data on likely contact sites, whether on buses or anywhere else.

Districts 54 and 214 contract with private bus firms. Officials there said they don't know the causes of the driver shortage.

"We've experienced delays and overcrowded buses as a result of this national bus driver shortage," District 214 spokeswoman Stephanie Kim said. "Between last week and this week, our solution has been to tier some bus routes at all six of our high schools. That means some students will be arriving earlier to school in the morning and some students will leave school later at the end of the day."

The bus firm District 54 contracts -- First Student -- has responded to the driver shortage by consolidating its routes. The district is working with the company to recruit additional bus drivers, but it will take some time, McHugh said.

In Des Plaines Elementary District 62, which also contracts with First Student, officials are offering a variety of incentives, including an increase in starting pay and a signing and retention bonus, to recruit drivers.

"Much is being done to remedy this shortage, however a significant factor that has affected us is that many drivers went to work driving delivery trucks during the pandemic when schools were closed and businesses were hiring all available drivers," Superintendent Paul Hertel wrote in a letter to families.

With buses running at capacity, the district has been forced to stop transporting some paid bus riders.

"This is not something that we want to do, however it is necessary in order for the district to transport all the students we are legally required to bus," Hertel wrote. "We are working to find solutions to transport students to and from sporting events. A full refund will be issued and should the district be able to accept new paid riders back later this school year, affected families will not pay a fee to ride the bus this year as a way of compensating them for this inconvenience."

At District 15, officials are looking for ways to reduce ridership, in addition to hiring and training more drivers to transport more than 11,000 students using 122 district-owned buses.

"We are not offering paid transportation again this year and we have asked parents who are able, to opt-out of transportation," spokeswoman Becca Latham said. "Both actions have allowed us to have fewer bus riders this year. That said, however, our buses are fuller this year than they were last year when a capacity limit was in place and when we were able to offer two-instructional pathways for students."

Barely one week into the school year, Round Lake Area Unit District 116 is seeing three times the normal amount of car riders so far causing additional congestion at arrival/dismissal times.

"So far, we are in a good spot with bus drivers but anticipate that we may need to be flexible and ready to shift to cover routes in the event of any outbreaks within the team," district spokeswoman Heather Bennett said.

Daily Herald staff writer Eric Peterson contributed to this report.

---Elgin Courier-News--09/01/2021

Sleepy Hollow man charged with 14 felonies after police find guns, coke and stolen goods; minor hit by car near Larkin HS

by Gloria Casas; Note: This article also ran at [chicagotribune.com](https://www.chicagotribune.com)

Minor hit by car near Larkin High School

A juvenile was struck by a vehicle Monday afternoon on McLean Boulevard and Van Street near **Larkin High School**, Elgin police said.

The victim was transported to an area hospital with non-life-threatening injuries, police said. No name or age was released.

The intersection of the incident is in a school zone for the high school. No charges have been filed and the investigation remains ongoing, police said.

---Chicago Tribune--09/01/2021

COVID-19 outbreaks reported at 26 Illinois schools, weeks after start of new school year

by Karen Ann Cullotta

More than two dozen Illinois schools are reporting COVID-19 outbreaks, weeks after students returned to the classroom for in-person learning at fully reopened schools.

The Illinois Department of Public Health on Tuesday listed 26 Illinois schools with COVID-19 outbreaks, including several in the suburban Chicago areas of Cook, Lake, Kane and Will counties.

While a few schools reporting outbreaks have been put on probation by the state for flouting Gov. J.B. Pritzker's school mask mandate, most of the recent outbreaks are at school districts that are complying with the executive order, including **Glenbrook Elementary School** in Streamwood, which reported between 11 and 16 related cases of COVID-19.

"Due to a COVID outbreak in a fourth/fifth split grade level classroom, we shifted to Distance Learning for this classroom only, effective today," Glenbrook principal Cheryl DeRoo wrote in an Aug. 24 parent letter.

The classroom is closed until Sept. 7, DeRoo said, a decision that was made by **Elgin-based Unit School District 46 Superintendent Tony Sanders** based on the recommendation of the Cook County Health Department.

With the exception of the one classroom, "the remainder of our Glenbrook Elementary classrooms remain open for in-person learning," DeRoo wrote.

Other suburban Chicago schools reporting COVID-19 outbreaks this week include Oak Park-River Forest High School, Maine East High School, East Aurora School District 131, Highland Elementary School in Skokie, Woodland Elementary School in Grayslake, Kaneland John Shields Elementary School in Elburn, and Nelson Ridge Elementary School in New Lenox.



Christian Liberty Academy on Aug. 31, 2021, in Arlington Heights. The private school has been added to the list of Illinois schools the state has found to be noncompliant with Gov. J.B. Pritzker's school mask mandate. (Stacey Wescott / Chicago Tribune)

Outbreaks reported by IDPH include those that have been identified by the school's local health department to have two or more COVID-19 cases among people who may have a shared exposure on school grounds and are from different households.

The criteria for an outbreak was previously five or more cases but recently changed, said IDPH spokeswoman Melaney Arnold.

"Outbreaks at schools are two or more cases epidemiologically linked — people were in the same space at the same time," Arnold said in a statement.

Case counts for school-related outbreaks also include those associated with before and after school programs, including school-sponsored activities such as athletic events.

Most of the schools listed as having outbreaks reported fewer than five cases. Downstate Carlyle School District 1, which is on the state's list of school districts refusing to comply with the statewide indoor mask mandate, reported 16 or more.

The [state's school COVID-19 data](#), which is updated weekly, on Tuesday also included 546 schools identified by contact tracers as having "potential" COVID-19 exposures.

The number of public and private schools sanctioned for noncompliance with Gov. J.B. Pritzker's school mask mandate also continued to climb this week, with a private school in Arlington Heights, the Christian Liberty Academy, among the latest to have its status changed to "unrecognized."

Officials at Christian Liberty were not immediately available for comment Tuesday.

In an Aug. 26 letter to the school, Illinois State Board of Education Superintendent Carmen Ayala warned the state had "verified that Christian Liberty Academy will not comply with the universal masking requirements set forth in (the mask mandate)," and was "removing your school's status as a recognized nonpublic school, effective immediately."

As a result of being non-recognized, the school will face a slate of consequences, including being prohibited from participating in Illinois High School Association and Illinois

Elementary School Association sanctioned sports, and families will be blocked from the Invest in Kids Act tax scholarship program.

“We do not take this action lightly,” Ayala wrote. “The purpose of the universal indoor masking requirement is to ensure that all students can safely attend school in-person this fall.”

While ISBE has reported 62 Illinois school districts since the start of the 2021-22 school year are failing to comply with the mask mandate, a growing number of schools have since agreed to follow the order.

---Daily Herald--09/01/2021

Bartlett teen charged with reckless homicide in crash that killed two friends

by Susan Sarkauskas

A Bartlett teenager is facing two counts of reckless homicide in connection with a crash that killed two **Bartlett High School** students.

The boy's age was unavailable, and his name was not released by the DuPage County state's attorney's office. He is being charged in juvenile court.

The Aug. 3 crash killed Alex Czerwik and Cameron Kelty, both 16. Alex died at the scene; Cameron died on Aug. 6. A third boy, also 16, was injured.

Prosecutors allege the Bartlett teen was driving his mother's car with three friends when the crash occurred. The teen was driving north on Newport Boulevard when he accelerated up to 100 mph as he approached a curve at Devon Avenue. The car left the road and struck a utility pole at roughly 80 mph, officials said.

"The tragic loss of two young men who were friends of the teen just rips your heart in two," DuPage County State's Attorney Robert Berlin said in the release. "On behalf of the DuPage County State's Attorney's Office, I extend our sincerest condolences to the family and friends

of Alex Czerwik and Cameron Kelty as they try to piece their lives back together after such a devastating loss."

According to an online fundraising campaign and a Facebook post by the Bartlett Raiders youth football organization, the other boy injured in the crash was Alex's brother. The brothers and Cameron had played for the Raiders; Alex and his brother had volunteered that day at practice. Alex also was on the Bartlett High School football team.

The teen and his parents are scheduled to make their first court appearance on Sept. 30.

---The Examiner of Bartlett--09/01/2021 Hire of U-46 principal subject of FOIA request

by Seth Hancock

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

The Examiner was met with prevarication from **School District U-46** and differing information to what was obtained in a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request concerning the hiring of **Art Fessler**, now the interim principal at **Bartlett's Eastview Middle School**.

Fessler was the superintendent at Elk Grove Township School District 59 the past eight years, but that district's board decided to part ways with Fessler at the end of his contract (ending on June 30) because of controversies during his tenure, according to other media reports. He was offered a job with Northwest Suburban Special Education Organization which was rescinded sometime in May, according to that coverage, as it was designed to get Fessler the one year necessary to cash in on his full taxpayer-funded pension.

However, Fessler has now been given a "one-year only" contract with U-46, said **Superintendent Tony Sanders**, after being hired and included in a July 19 personnel report, unanimously approved by the Board of Education, as an interim district wide middle school principal with an effective starting date on July 1.

Sanders has known Fessler "at least eight years and asked him to apply," according to Mary Fergus, director of school and community relations. At least one member of Sanders' cabinet previously served under Fessler's cabinet in SD59.

A FOIA request was made after The Examiner received an anonymous tip from a U-46 staff member. What was learned from that FOIA is the position was posted and filled all on the same day, July 1, and Ann Chan, assistant superintendent of human resources, sent an offer letter to Fessler on July 2.

Fessler's base salary along with employer contribution to the pension system is \$142,857. The district did not respond when asked if Fessler was on the district's payroll on the effective starting date of July 1, the day before an offer was made to him.

Chan was asked by The Examiner, but Sanders responded and claimed he “asked my administrative team to interview” Fessler who “was screened by several senior administrators” and he “directed Human Resources to make the appointment on June 30.” In follow-ups, the district would not answer if any of those interviews and information was documented, and if so, why it wasn’t included in the FOIA response despite that information being specifically asked for.

The teacher’s union contract, under sections 11.1 and 11.2, require “all openings for principals” to “be posted in the offices and faculty rooms of all buildings,” and “any promotional vacancy” must be posted “at least” 20 days. It does allow “emergency” hires, but the Eastview position did not start until Aug. 9, according to the district’s own press release, meaning there was over a month from when Fessler was hired as a districtwide principal on July 1.

The anonymous source said “normally, if we lose a principal suddenly, we hire back a recent retiree to sub for a while,” but Sanders said it’s “not rare” to “hire teachers, principals and program administrators districtwide.”

Several principal candidates were interviewed, according to Sanders, for other open positions: “I knew there would be a vacancy at a middle school beyond the ones that were already open at Larsen Middle and Ellis Middle. I had already interviewed several candidates for middle school principals and there were no other candidates that I would be willing to hire permanently.”

---The Examiner of Bartlett--09/01/2021

Expenditure proposals slated for U-46 board

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 \$1.1 million on expenditure items at its meeting on Monday, Sept. 13. The items were presented on Aug. 23.

Included is \$1 million, from the education fund if approved, for contracts with police departments from the City of Elgin and villages of Bartlett, South Elgin and Streamwood to provide school resource officers (SRO) at the district’s middle and high schools.

“The goal of the program is to create a safe school environment, and provide a law enforcement resource to school administrators, teachers, and students,” the proposal states.

The contracts will increase 2.7 percent from last year. Bartlett will provide two SROs (\$71,842 salary, \$73.39/hour overtime), Elgin seven (\$71,177 salary, \$69/hour overtime), South Elgin two (\$69,692 salary, \$66.84/hour overtime) and Streamwood three (\$75,298 salary, \$73.81/hour overtime).

The contract includes new professional development and training required by the district on the SROs including two run by U-46, non-violent crisis intervention and student special needs awareness in autism and special education.

Board member Eva Porter, regarding discipline, asked to “make sure that we are evaluating... culture, diversity and sensitivity training for our SROs is implemented.”

Superintendent Tony Sanders responded: “SROs do not get involved in discipline. Only if it rises to the level of criminal offense of some sort that must be reported then they do get involved, but for discipline they do not get involved.”

Costing \$72,000, to be paid by the nation’s taxpayers through grant funds, the district is seeking a contract with Northern Illinois University “to educate our own teachers to ensure they have the appropriate skill set to best support our students,” the proposal states, relating to English as a second language special education students.

Also being sought is \$29,399 (education fund) for Footprints software used in the information services department.

---WSPY (FM 107.1)News, WSPYNews.com--09/01/2021

IDPH releases early school Covid-19 data

by Mark Harrington

New data released shows potential COVID-19 exposure and outbreaks in area schools. According to the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH), potential COVID exposure is when fewer than five students are identified.

As of last Friday, the numbers are 68 schools in DuPage County, 55 in Kane, 26 in Will, five in DeKalb, four in LaSalle and Grundy, three in Kendall and two in Lee County.

Schools identified on the IDPH web site include Aurora Central Catholic High School, DeKalb CUSD 428, Hinckley Big Rock Elementary, Sandwich Middle School, Plano High School, Yorkville Middle School, and Churchill Elementary School in Oswego 308. On the list also are Minooka High School, Minooka Jr. High, Morris High School, Seneca High School, Reed Custer, and Mendota and Ottawa high schools.

Covid outbreaks used to be classified as five or more cases but has been changed to two or more in the same space at the same time, according to the IDPH. Outbreaks have occurred at John Shields Elementary in the Kaneland School District, East Aurora School District 131, and in **Elgin U-46**, according to a Chicago Tribune report.

Statewide, 546 schools have been identified by contract tracers as having potential COVID-19 exposures.

---Cardinal News (Arlingtoncardinal.com)---09/01/2021 Christian Liberty Academy Gets “Non-Recognized” Status by Illinois Board of Education Regarding Mask Order

Vaccine Requirement Coming Sep. 5, 2021

Christian Liberty Academy was classified as “non-recognized” on Thursday, Aug. 26, 2021 by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) for not complying with the Mask Requirement which the State of Illinois claims helps protect against the spread of COVID-19.

As of Tuesday, Aug. 31, 2021, there are 13 school across Illinois that are actively categorized as “non-recognized.” ISBE established a list of schools, including public and private schools, that are categorized as “Non-recognized” or “On Probation” connected to Coronavirus mitigation procedures.

According to the ISBE, the board is working in partnership with the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) to ensure the state board of education is providing the most current resources and guidance to support Illinois education communities regarding the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak. The ISBE sets educational policies and guidelines for public and private schools, preschool through grade 12. ISBE board members are appointed by the governor of the State of Illinois.

The Non-recognized status affects the school’s eligibility to participate in IHSA events and the Invest in Kids Act scholarship program. On Facebook, Christian Liberty Academy promoted a *Rally for Parental Rights* event that was scheduled on August 11, 2021.

Across Illinois, 46 schools have been categorized as “On Probation” even after school officials agreed to comply with the State of Illinois Mask mandate. Some schools have been re-established as “Fully Recognized”. Most of the schools on the ISBE list of recognition status are not located in Chicagoland. Among the total 60 private and public schools on the status list, 47 are public schools as of Monday, Aug. 30, 2021.

MASK REQUIREMENT

Gov. JB Pritzker announced a Mask Requirement effective immediately for all students, teachers, and staff at pre-kindergarten – 12th grade schools and day care centers in a press release on Wednesday, Aug. 4, 2021.

In preparation for the start of the upcoming school year and in response to the highly contagious Delta variant, all students, teachers, and staff at pre-kindergarten – 12th grade schools and day cares will be required to wear masks regardless of vaccination status, effective immediately. This guidance is in line with recommendations from the CDC, according to the press release.

The state is also requiring universal masking in long-term care facilities regardless of vaccination status.

Illinois is home to 1.8 million children under the age of 12 who are not yet eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, according to the press release. With the “Delta variant infecting the

younger population at a greater rate and with people under 29 years old now accounting for 12 percent of COVID hospitalizations in June, requiring the use of masks is the most effective tool to allow students to return to their classrooms safely while protecting them from the virus.” the release said. Mask wearing will also help prevent unvaccinated students from transmitting the virus to more vulnerable members of their broader communities, said the Governor’s statement.

The mask requirement is inclusive of youth sports and activities, with masks now required for all indoor extracurriculars and sports. In line with CDC guidance, masks are not required for activities outdoors where transmission risks and rates are lower.

The administration is providing free testing to all pre-K-12 schools in Illinois outside of Chicago, which received a separate federal funding allocation for testing.

IDPH also provided additional guidance for students and staff who are exposed to someone who tests positive for COVID-19. Close contacts of a positive case can remain in school if they receive testing on days one, three, five, and seven post exposure and if they wore masks at the time of exposure.

“The CDC strengthened its guidance last week for universal indoor masking in schools, and Illinois will continue to follow the science, data, and public health experts to keep students in school and keep communities safe,” said State Superintendent of Education Dr. Carmen I. Ayala. “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.”

A number of school districts across the state have already adopted CDC guidance and implemented a mask requirement to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 among students, teachers, and staff and the communities they live in. Those districts include the state’s two largest school districts, Chicago and **Elgin U-46**, as well as Edwardsville Community School District 7, Peoria Public School District 150, Champaign Unit 4 School District, Springfield School District 186, and Naperville School District 203, according to the August 4, 2021 press release.

In addition, the Illinois State Board of Education has identified 62 of 859 Illinois school districts not complying with the state mask mandate during this new school year.