

Press Clippings Through June 25, 2025

- Chicago Tribune / The Courier News - Elgin News Digest: Park district adds pre-concert demos to summer concerts; U-46's production of 'Man of La Mancha' opens Thursday

By: Mike Danahey

Date: June 24, 2025

U-46's production of 'Man of La Mancha' opens Thursday

The School District U-46 summer theater production of "Man of La Mancha" will run Thursday through Saturday, June 26-28, at the Streamwood High School auditorium, 701 W. Schaumburg Road.

More than 75 students and employees from across the district's five high schools make up the cast, musicians and technical crew for the musical, according to a U-46 newsletter.

Showtimes are 7 p.m. Thursday and Friday and noon Saturday. Tickets are \$10 and can be purchased online through Booktix or at the door.

- Chicago Tribune / The Courier News - Elgin News Digest: ECC's Project Backpack in need of volunteers, sponsors; lunchtime hike to be held at Hawthorne Hill Nature Center

By: Mike Danahey

Date: June 20, 2025



Recent Elgin High School graduates Mahitha Ratakonda, left, and Aarav Patel took first place in the disease detectives category in the Illinois Science Olympiad held at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

Six U-46 students earn first place at Illinois Science Olympiad

Six School District U-46 students earned first-place honors at the Illinois Science Olympiad.

Teams from Eastview Middle School in Bartlett, Larsen Middle School in Elgin and Elgin High School competed in April at University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and were honored at a June meeting of the U-46 school board, according to a news release.

Pratyush Ramesh, who graduated from Elgin High last month, and junior Abhinav Arvind finished first in the anatomy and physiology category. Classmates Aarav Patel and Mahitha Ratakonda, who both graduated last month, finished first in the disease detectives category, which involved epidemiology case studies.

Eastview students Jacob Baca and Melia Ortiz-Tan, who will be eighth-graders in the fall, earned first place in the remote sensing trial event.

- Daily Herald -

U-46 board honors student musicians, singers, actors and more

By: Tara Burghart, Elgin Area School District U-46

Date: June 10, 2025



Several of the members of the South Elgin High Honors Treble Chorus honored at the June 9 meeting. They were a “Featured School” at the Illinois Music Education Association All-State Music Festival.

Nearly 100 Elgin Area School District U-46 high school students were recognized by the board of education at its June 9 meeting.

The students were honored with an “Accent on Achievement” recognition for their outstanding achievements in the fine arts, on the same evening the district was honored by the board for being named one of the “Best Communities for Music Education.”

This is the seventh straight year U-46 has earned the “Best Communities” recognition from the National Association of Music Merchants Foundation, and it was among fewer than 30 school districts in Illinois to receive the honor this past school year.

The recognition is awarded to districts that demonstrate outstanding achievement for providing music access and education to all students.

U-46 Fine Arts Coordinator Jaimie Giraldo and South Elgin High School Choral Educator Amanda Brex-Castillo accepted the Accent on Achievement certificate from the board on behalf of the music department.

In addition, Giraldo also received an Accent on Achievement for being named the “Arts Educator of the Year” by the Elgin Symphony Orchestra, which cited her passion for ensuring all young people have access to arts education.

Of the 98 Accent on Achievement certificates issued by the board, 12 went to students who received a special honor for being selected as All-State Musicians through the Illinois Music Education Association’s (ILMEA) competitive audition process. This is the highest musical achievement for high schoolers in Illinois. Selected students performed at the ILMEA’s annual music education conference in Peoria earlier this year.

Another 45 students were part of South Elgin High School’s honors treble chorus, directed by Brex-Castillo. After submitting an application and audition videos, the chorus was chosen from

among hundreds of applicants as a featured school ensemble to perform at the ILMEA's all-state music festival.

Ellie Jahnke, a May graduate from South Elgin High School, received two Accent on Achievement certificates — for being a member of the All-State Chorus and also for performing with the South Elgin High honors treble chorus. She said taking a choral class as an elective, and being a part of the school's choral groups, provided her with a sense of community.

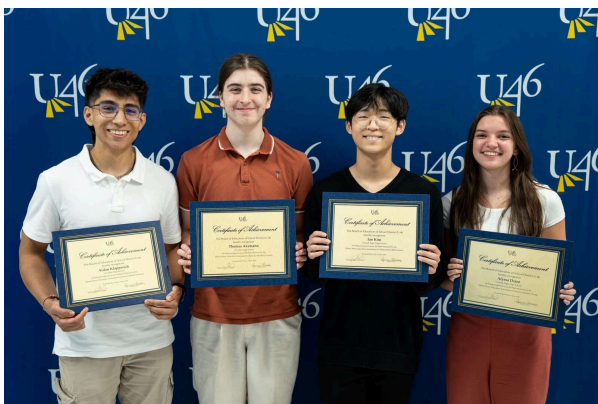
"It has given me a lot of confidence outside of the classroom," she said. "It has been just a great way for me to grow as a person and as a musician. I've met so many amazing people through it, and it's helped me emotionally and socially."

Two of the students were also honored for their performance in the pit orchestra for the all-state production of "The Prom" at the Illinois High School Theatre Festival. The students submitted audition recordings and were also selected from hundreds of submissions from around the state.

Finally, 41 students either acted in or were a part of the technical crew for South Elgin High School's production of "Anne of Green Gables" that was chosen as a featured school production at the Illinois High School Theatre Festival. Schools apply to the festival to perform, and adjudicators attend each applying production to determine which ones will be selected to perform.

Giraldo said she was pleased that the board was able to recognize so many students excelling in the arts, all on the same evening.

"I have a very happy heart," Giraldo said. "It just makes me so happy to see our fine arts students getting recognized. Sometimes our arts students don't feel that celebration as much as maybe, say, someone competing in sports, and here in U-46, I am proud that we see their efforts and successes and recognize them for their achievements. I'm so proud of them and of our teachers, and so happy to be a part of such a great community here."



Four of the Elgin Area School District U-46 students in the Illinois Music Education Association All-State Music Festival: Individual honored at the June 9 meeting: from left, Aidan Klapperich, Thomas Akemann, Ian Kim and Alyssa Dzien.

Illinois Music Education Association All-State Music Festival: Individual

- Sophomore Ian Kim, South Elgin High, All-State Honors Band, Bb Clarinet
- Juniors Jarvin Ignacio, Bartlett High, All-State Chorus, Bass II; Thomas Akemann, Larkin High, All-State Band, Contra-Bass Clarinet; Thomas Akemann, Larkin High, All-State Composition Contest: Second Place; Aidan Klapperich, Larkin High, All-State Honors Band, Trombone; and Alyssa Dzien, South Elgin High, All-State Honors Orchestra, Viola
- Seniors David Burmann, Streamwood High, All-State: Future Music Educators Symposium; John Drew, Elgin High, All-State Honors Orchestra, Viola; Ellie Jahnke, South Elgin High, All-State Honors Chorus, Alto II; Ruby Montgomery South Elgin High, All-State Honors Chorus, Soprano I; Maria Serban, South Elgin High, All-State: Future Music Educators Symposium; and Amy Skrabacz, South Elgin High, All-State Honors Band, Bb Clarinet.

Illinois Music Education Association All-State Music Festival: Featured School Ensemble

South Elgin High School Honors Treble Chorus with director Amanda Brex-Castillo, accompanist Joan Doran, and percussionists junior Ivan Zamudio and senior Magdalena Czapla.

- Sopranos: Seniors Birdie Budzban, Jade Galvan, Arabella Maegdlin, Lucia Melchiorre, Ruby Montgomery, Gianna Munera, Maja Nagalska, Maria Spanos, Abi Wallis, Soha Yasir, and Melanie Zarate; juniors Camryn Antor, Natalia Colon, Gianna Heinrich, Meadow Macalindong, Shannon Strickland, and Samantha Weber; and sophomores Kate Fenner, Maddie Gallagher, Esther Gutierrez, and Peyton Hawkins.
- Altos: seniors Ava Gutierrez, Ellie Jahnke, Rose Lockard, Raven Malone, Alexa Medina-Protz, Ella Mesina, Alex Sanchez, Maria Serban, and Ali Thoma; juniors Maria Cecala, Rebecca Herrmann, Alex Mascorro, Jules Nelson, Grayson Rowland, Frida Salgado, Reagan Schaal, Kai Scordas, Lilyanna Sjurset, and Lihanna Thayasouth; and sophomores Jessica Cruz, Maddie Martin, and Cailyn Smith

Illinois High School Theatre Festival: All-State Production (Individual)

“The Prom” with assistant director Mike Miserendino (Bartlett High theater teacher) with senior Ethan Bakos, Bartlett High, ensemble, Principal Hawkins Understudy; and sophomore Isabella (Izzy) Nelson, Bartlett High, pit orchestra, violin

Illinois High School Theatre Festival: Featured School Production

South Elgin High School's production of "Anne of Green Gables" with director Jess Smith; assistant director JP Quirk, producer Andrew Brhel, costumer Karen Brhel, and technical director Kurt Burkhardt.

- Seniors Vixen Morhardt as Marilla Cuthbert, Sean Mydlach as Matthew Cuthbert, Aditi Patel as Mrs. Spencer, Mac Klinger as Mrs. Rachel Lynde, Ashley Prasil as Miss Stacy, Avi McCollim as Woman in Silk, and Soha Yasir as Girl in White Lace;

- Juniors Kai Scordas as Anne, AJ Foster as Thomas Lynde, Jess Irons as Mrs. Barry, Justin Denton as Gilbert Blythe, Meghan Englund as Ms. Gold, Ali Radke as Erika Jefferson, and Aditya Mittal-ensemble

- Sophomores Lily Barthel as Diana Barry, Cailyn Smith as Ruby Gillis, Finn Berber as Maria Marillo, and Connor Thompson-ensemble

- Freshmen Charlotte Lippe as Josie Pye, Junior Beanland as Moody MacPherson, Cameron Dicus as Charlie Sloane, Mia Dastrup as Tammy Diaz, and Maegan Cooper- ensemble

With tech crew members Ella Banach, Annabeth Baughcum, Liv Beach, Noah Cheney, Bianca Lamberti, Rose Lockard, Regina Merced, Laila Miulli, Evelyn Pajeau, Juan Perez, Sophie Potenzo, Elise Pratt, Kayla Shimabuku, Jordan Slovik, Jersie Speidel, Ryan Suarez, Abi Wallis, and Adler Wilen.

- Chicago Tribune / The Courier News - District U-46 buys cyber liability insurance, considers AI tech for teachers

By: Mike Danahey

Date: June 17, 2025

District U-46 School Board members Monday approved the purchase of cyber liability insurance policy and discussed the purchase of ChatGPT Edu, an AI product that would be used by teachers, coaches and administrators.

The \$118,283 insurance policy with Tokio Marine HCC would run from July 1 through June 30, 2026, and comes with a \$3 million limit and a \$100,000 deductible, according to documents provided for the meeting.

"U-46's decision to purchase a cybersecurity insurance policy was driven by the growing frequency and sophistication of cyber threats targeting school districts nationwide," Deputy Superintendent of Instruction Lela Majstorovic said prior to the meeting.

It's become necessary, Majstorovic said, because as student and staff data systems become more interconnected, the potential financial and operational risks from a cyber incident have increased significantly.

Meeting documents said that "since 2023, 108 ransomware attacks have impacted over 1,800 schools nationwide. ... According to Alliant Insurance Services, the district's insurance broker, the average ransom demand in 2024 was approximately \$847,000."

"While the district has very strong, state of the art preventive measures in place," Majstorovic said, "insurance offers added reassurance in managing unforeseen events. Purchasing a cybersecurity insurance policy adds a critical layer of financial protection and support in the event of an attack."

At Monday's meeting, Majstorovic and Rola Tarek Mohamed, a research and project management fellow, also continued a board discussion about whether to spend \$432,000 for 4,000 educator ChatGPT Edu licenses with Open AI for the 2025-26 school year.

The system will allow educators "to use AI as a planning assistant, research partner and support tool," Mohamed said at the meeting. The deal would include staff training on how to use the technology.

ChatGPT Edu could allow users to write an email that ensures "it's appropriate to the intended audience," upload curriculum frameworks to create specific tasks, and check that lesson plans align with board-adopted curriculum, among other things, Majstorovic said.

"Any teacher is expected to do this level of planning on an every-single-day basis," she said. "Using a tool like this could really help with navigating that planning."

Time currently being used for such work can free teachers up to do other things, such as thinking about how they are giving kids that "in-the-moment feedback so that they can continue to learn," Majstorovic said.

Mohamed told the board that related AI guidelines prohibit sharing any personal data or using it for grading.

Board member Dawn Martin said she wasn't convinced the technology would be completely beneficial.

"I have a lot of concerns with this, the ethics, the integrity behind AI, the ability of it to take away critical thought, especially if we start rolling it out for students," she said. "Just because something exists doesn't mean embracing it is fully the way (to go)."

U-46 Superintendent Suzanne Johnson said, “I think we find ourselves in this really interesting place where we have to start to determine what are the guardrails that we can identify and create, how do we support professional learning, how do we start to do some of that — if it’s sooner than later — as it’s preparation for this thing that now exists.”

Any proposal won’t be back for discussion for at least five weeks, Johnson said, so there’s time for more board input and feedback.

- Daily Herald -

Kate Thommes takes on Bridge Builder program manager role at Marklund

By: Dawn Lassiter-Brueske, Marklund
Date: June 10, 2025



Kate Thommes

Kate Thommes of Elgin was recently named program manager for the Bridge Builder CDS Program at Marklund.

Bridge Builder CDS is a community day services program offering vocational and special education services to adults with developmental disabilities and autism who have aged out of traditional education and transition programs. It is located at Marklund’s Nathan Education Center in Elgin.

A board member for Elgin Area School District U-46, Thommes had previously worked as an adjunct faculty member at Elgin Community College, was a teacher for Ascension Alexian Brothers Behavior Health, Jacobs High School in District 300, and Eastview Middle School in District U-46. She was also an ESL Services Specialist for the Elk Grove Village Public Library, and was the senior manager of training for a series of nonprofit healthcare clinics.

Thommes holds a Master of Arts in Teaching from Aurora University, a Masters in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) from St. Thomas University, and a bachelor's degree and Professional Educator's License from Illinois State University.

Founded in 1954, Marklund is a nonprofit organization in Elgin, Geneva and Bloomingdale that provides residential, therapeutic and education services to children and adults with severe and profound developmental disabilities. Learn more at www.marklund.org.

- Daily Herald -

Baseball: McHenry rallies past South Elgin

By: Joe Aguilar

Date: June 09, 2025



South Elgin's Nathan Kmiec fields a ground ball during the boys baseball Class 4A Kane County Cougars Supersectional against McHenry on Monday, June 9, 2025 at Northwestern Medicine field in Geneva.

Super reliever, super steady Zach Readdy has been in and out of the McHenry lineup this baseball season. Monday night, he almost took a pitch out of a minor league ballpark.

Readdy delivered a pair of two-out, two-run hits, Kaden Wasniewski finished with two exciting innings in his first mound appearance in more than six weeks, and McHenry rallied to beat South Elgin 8-6 in the Class 4A Kane County Cougars supersectional at Northwestern Medicine Field in Geneva.

“It was awesome,” Readdy said after the Warriors erased an early 4-0 deficit to hike their school-record win total to 35. “Nothing like it.”

McHenry (35-4-1) has another chance to experience thrills when it plays Brother Rice in a state semifinal at 7 p.m. Friday at Slammers Stadium in Joliet. McHenry finished fourth in Class 4A in 2022, its first and only appearance at state.

The game marked the final one for South Elgin’s Jim Kating, who’s been the only head coach for the Storm since the program’s initial season in 2007. The Storm finished third in Class 4A in 2014, its only appearance at state.

“We played well, we battled to the end, and I’m very proud of my kids of how they came out,” said Kating, whose team was the No. 4 seed in its sectional. “We had nothing to lose. We weren’t supposed to be anywhere close to where (McHenry) is at.”

South Elgin (25-11) jumped out to an early lead, scoring four runs in the second. Ninth hitter Nathan Kmiec delivered a two-out, two-run single for the game’s first runs.

McHenry got three runs back in the third, with Readdy’s two-run triple the big blow. He pulled a fastball deep to right field, and the ball bounced off the wall.

He does not have a home run this season.

“It was in on my hands,” said Readdy, a St. Xavier commit. “I got a little jammed, but I just muscled it out there. It almost went.”

Readdy delivered again in the sixth, lining a go-ahead, two-run double with two out into left-center field to make the score 7-5 in favor of the Warriors.

“I was sitting curveball and I just reacted to it,” said Readdy, who hit another fastball. “I was on it, and I put it the other way. It was outside and I went with it.”

“Really clutch,” said Wasniewski, who was on base three times with a hit by pitch, walk and single. “He’s not been in the lineup (consistently) all year, but he really came through for us today.”

The sophomore Wasniewski earned the save for Scotty Cole, who pitched $3\frac{1}{3}$ innings in relief of starter Bryson Elbrecht. Wasniewski walked one but struck out the side in a scoreless sixth with McHenry leading 7-5.

In the seventh, he allowed a leadoff double to Jake Sparacino and then an RBI single to Jacob Robertson. But Wasniewski got a ground out and back-to-back fly outs to center fielder Carver Cohn to end it.

“It’s so fun to watch him pitch,” Readdy said. “Everything he has is gross. He throws hard. Can’t ask for anything more.”

Wasniewski last pitched in a game April 24. The Warriors then shut down the hard-throwing righty because his shoulder was bothering him.

In warmups Monday, he hit 95 mph on the stadium radar gun. He started his second game in a row at third base after being relegated to designated-hitter duties the past month.

“It feels really good, really fresh,” Wasniewski said of his arm. “I pretty much knew that once I got in, my arm would feel great.”