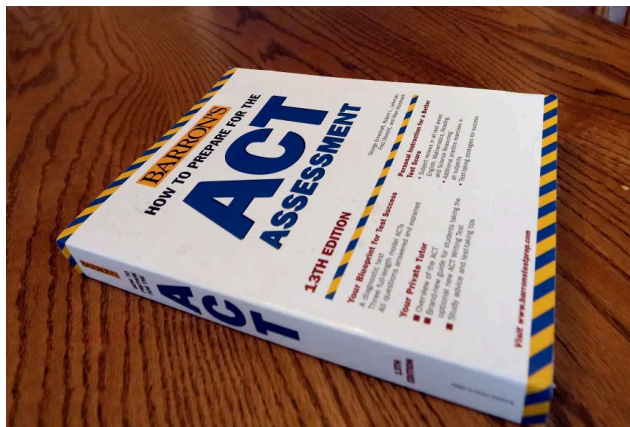


Press Clippings Through June 05, 2025

- Chicago Tribune / The Courier News - U-46 plans to cover cost of high school juniors taking the ACT in fall

By: Mike Danahey

Date: June 3, 2025



School District U-46 will pay for high school juniors to take the ACT test in the fall.

School District U-46 will pay for high school juniors to take the ACT test in the fall in an effort to familiarize students with the exam, meet dual-credit application requirements and potentially boost scores.

The standardized tests will cost \$121,862 according to a proposal endorsed Monday by the U-46 school board and to be formally approved June 16.

“This is a new initiative to stay in alignment with the Illinois State Assessment for 11th-graders,” said U-46 Assessment Director Matthew Raimondi, who spoke about the plan prior to the meeting.

The state requires all 11th-grade students and any untested 12th-grade students take the ACT with Writing exam as part of the spring state assessment in order to graduate. That test features a 40-minute written essay session, according to the ACT website.

“For many years previously, the SAT was part of the graduation requirement in Illinois,” Raimondi said. “Now, by offering the ACT to juniors in the fall, it provides students the opportunity to get familiar with the format before the mandatory ACT in the spring.”

The district had considered offering the PreACT to juniors in the fall but opted against it because Elgin Community College and other community colleges do not accept its scores for admitting qualifying dual-credit students, he said. PreACT scores also aren't considered for scholarship opportunities, such as those offered by the National Merit Scholarship Corp.

"The actual ACT does count for dual credit, directly aligns to the state test, is college reportable and allows for students to submit a 'Super Score,'" Raimondi said.

A Super Score lets students to submit their highest score from each test subject from different test dates when applying to college, he said.

According to a memo provided as part of the Monday meeting agenda, "a student who performs best in English and reading in the fall and in math and science in the spring may submit an ACT superscore combining their top section scores for college admissions."

After taking the ACT test in the fall, based on their performance, students will have access to targeted activities to build their subject skills in preparation for taking the mandatory ACT in the spring, the memorandum said.

"We are excited to offer this new opportunity for our students and help them prepare for the spring test," Raimondi said prior to the meeting.

The district has been providing the PSAT, which aligns with the state test, and offers dual-credit opportunities, both of which can lead to scholarship opportunities through the National Merit program, he said.

"We are planning to continue to offer the PSAT to 10th-graders and 11th-graders in the fall," Raimondi said.

With the state and the federal government requiring high school students to take so many tests, Superintendent Suzanne Johnson said staff would provide school board members with a calendar of when during the 2025-26 school year U-46 will be offering the various assessments.

- Daily Herald -
U-46 plans to cover cost of high school juniors taking the ACT in fall
By: Rick West

Date: June 02, 2025



Iise Zuno of Pingree Grove and her daughter Alessia, 3, have fun with items from a bag of early learning materials given out during a Learning On the Go session at Cornerstone Park in Elgin Monday.

More than 60 kids danced, sang and listened to a story in English and Spanish on Monday during the first session of a summer program that brings learning opportunities to underserved families with young children in the Elgin area.

Enriching Partnerships for Early Learning's Learning On the Go kicked off its ninth year Monday at Cornerstone Park in Elgin.

Cornerstone is one of five neighborhood parks and schools — three in Elgin and one each in Hanover Park and Streamwood — where the program meets to provide family engagement and early learning opportunities for kids up to age five and sometimes beyond.

“Our role is to engage the families, to inform, equip and support them,” said Amber Peters, executive director of EPEL. “We want to give them whatever they need to have children ready for kindergarten.

” EPEL is a nonprofit organization that partners with other area stakeholders to provide resources and early childhood initiatives for families with children younger than 5 years old.

The eight-week program features a basic theme each week with a gift to take home, such as art materials or seeds, a watering can or a weekly book the kids can pick out that is available in either English or Spanish



Kids at Enriching Partnerships for Early Learning's Learning On the Go session on Monday put chalk they were given to good use at Cornerstone Park in Elgin.

On the first visit on Monday, kids received a bag full of early learning materials they could use for the rest of the season. They also did movement activities, listened to a bilingual reading of “There Was an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly” and covered the nearby sidewalks in colorful art.

Representatives and resources from local groups like Centro de Informacion, St. Paul’s Diaper Distribution, Elgin Area School District U-46 and the Gail Borden Library were there to help parents with programs for their families.

Lunch is provided at some sites for the kids, and the Northern Illinois Food Bank was there Monday to provide food for families.

Sites and program days and times are available on the EPEL website at elginpartnership.org/. The program runs through the week of July 21.

Peters said more than 200 kids and family members visited program sites each week last summer. The locations are picked each year based on community data about families who might not be accessing resources like child care, health care and the library.

“It builds because it’s very organic, which is exciting,” Peters said. “Your best marketing tool is the families.”

While the hourlong visit is fun and educational for the kids, Peters said the focus is on the whole family.

“This program is really about the parents,” Peters said. “It’s modeling learning opportunities for the parents to provide for their children that they can do at home and don’t cost a lot of money.”

- Chicago Tribune / The Courier News - U-46 middle-schoolers to have no cellphone access during school day under proposed policy change

By: Mike Danahey

Date: May 30, 2025



When U-46 middle school students head back to class in August, the cellphones and smart watches they bring with them will be placed in locked pouches under a policy change expected to be approved Monday by the school board.

When U-46 middle school students head back to class in August, the cellphones and smart watches they bring with them will be placed in pouches and kept out of reach during school hours.

On Monday, the District U-46 School Board is set to award a \$172,750 contract to Yondr Inc. to purchase 6,625 pouches and 120 magnetic bases to lock and unlock them.

It’s just one of the measures U-46 will have in place in advance of pending legislation that would require school districts across Illinois to create policies controlling the use of wireless communication devices.

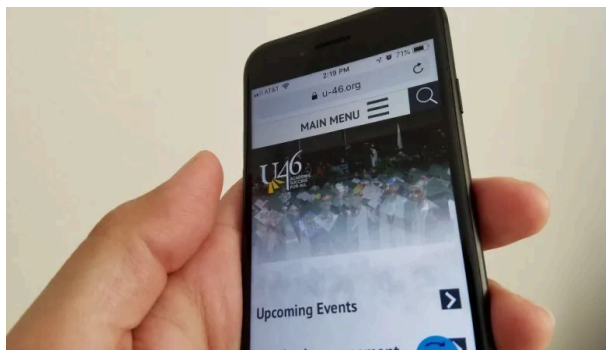
The phone pouches will be a tool to help ensure adherence to already established middle school guidelines that require students to put away their phones during the school day, said Mark Gonnella, U-46’s coordinator of culture.

“The pouches lock with a simple click. In order to unlock them you need the base offered by the company,” Gonnella said. “We have opted to have staff members hold them so that we are also able to greet the students at the beginning and the end of the day.”

If parents and students need to contact each other during the school day, calls will be made through landline office phones.

“In fact, that is the current expectation for communicating with all students in order to avoid disruptions to the learning environment,” Gonnella said.

During the recently completed school year, the district conducted a pilot program in which the pouches were used at Larsen Middle School in Elgin.



District U-46 middle school students will have their cellphones and smart watches locked up in pouches during the school under a policy change being enacted in August.

“The pouches proved successful as evidenced by reduced referrals and behavioral incidents overall as well as increased student engagement with one another and teachers and improved social-emotional well-being, to name a few,” Gonnella said.

Larsen principal Marc Spacone purchased board and card games for students to play on their lunch breaks, when they might otherwise be on their phones, and reported the students enjoyed them, he said.

The district also ran a pilot program at Streamwood High School in which cellphone use was prohibited in academic and instructional spaces and a system put in place to address infractions “using tiered discipline consistently at the site,” Gonnella said.

“For instance, the first time a Streamwood High School student had a cellphone out in a class, the teacher reminded them of the expectation that it should be put away,” he said. “If the device was out again, the student had to put the phone in a bag for the rest of the period, and they collected it at the end of the period.”

Gonnella said the consequences would escalate from there. If an administrator took the device for the rest of the school day, a family member had to come to the school to retrieve the device and discuss the incident with an administrator, he said.

William Johnson, U-46's high school executive director, said the Streamwood High School conducted quarterly focus groups with students and staff regarding the pilot guidelines.

"Both groups believe that the change has positively impacted the learning environment," Johnson said.

The test programs helped shape proposed code of conduct updates for all grade levels that the school board will consider approving Monday.

The guidelines note that "students who require the use of cellphones and/or other electronic devices due to compliance with the IEP/504 plan or a medical condition will be exempt from this regulation. Additionally, individual school sites may determine if cellphone use is essential for a specific learning experience, project or activity and adjust the guidelines accordingly for that specific instance."

The proposed updated code of conduct can be viewed at [go.boarddocs.com/il/u46/Board.nsf/files/DGNMMV5B9136/\\$file/Final%20Version%202025-2026%20Student%20Code%20of%20Conduct.pdf](https://go.boarddocs.com/il/u46/Board.nsf/files/DGNMMV5B9136/$file/Final%20Version%202025-2026%20Student%20Code%20of%20Conduct.pdf).

- Daily Herald -

‘It’s a great experience’: Final suburban speller eliminated in 8th round of Scripps National Spelling Bee

By: Madhu Krishnamurthy

Date: May 28, 2025



Speller Yahya Mohammed of Hoffman Estates, representing the Kane County regional Office of Education, competes in a preliminary round for the 2025 Scripps National Spelling Bee on Tuesday in National Harbor, Maryland. Yahya was eliminated Wednesday in the eighth round of the contest.

The last of four suburban spellers fighting for a chance to be the best in the nation was eliminated Wednesday in the eighth round of the 2025 Scripps National Spelling Bee.

Yahya Mohammed of Hoffman Estates made it through the seventh round after correctly spelling “osphresis.” He joined 39 other spellers whose vocabulary was tested in the eighth round.

But the 13-year-old seventh-grader at Larsen Middle School in Elgin was stumped by a question most Harry Potter fans would have aced: “What is a basilisk?”

Yahya’s answer — “an oblong building ending in a semicircular altar” — took him out of the running.

“I did not know the word at all,” said Yahya, speaking from the competition being held in Maryland.

The correct answer is: a mythological reptile with poisonous breath that can kill with a single glance — from the vivid imagination of JK Rowling, author of the popular “Harry Potter” book series.

Yahya finished in 36th place — a big improvement from his 2024 National Spelling Bee performance, when he tied for 60th.

“I was more ready this time,” Yahya said. “I feel happy and I feel like I have improved and I will come back better next year, hopefully.”

The 2026 contest will be Yahya’s last chance to compete.

But with the pressure off, for now, it's time for some well-earned rest.

"I have not been sleeping for two months," Yahya said. "It's been a great contest. It's always really fun. It's a great experience to be there."



Four suburban spellers were among the contestants in the 2025 Scripps National Spelling Bee, which began Tuesday and concludes Thursday. They are top from left, Shruthi Ayyagari of Aurora and Tyler Kochanski of Fox River Grove. Bottom from left, Yahya Mohammed of Hoffman Estates and Visharad Sathish of Grayslake.

This year's 243 national qualifiers — ranging in age from 8 to 14 years old — included Visharad Sathish of Grayslake, Tyler Kochanski of Fox River Grove, and Shruthi Ayyagari of Aurora, among 13 Illinois finalists.

Visharad, 12, a seventh-grader at Lake Forest Country Day School, and Tyler, 14, an eighth-grader at Saints Peter & Paul School in Cary, were eliminated in round three, which was a written test. They tied with other spellers who finished in 100th place.

Shruthi, 13, a seventh-grader at Francis Granger Middle School in Aurora, was eliminated in the fourth round after misspelling "coolth," finishing in 89th place.

The competition continues with the finals airing live from 7 to 9 p.m. Central Time Thursday on ION TV. It can be streamed on Ion Plus or Fubo.

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the iconic American competition, first held in 1925 with just nine participants, according to its website.

The last winner from the Chicago area was Balu Natarajan, of Hinsdale, in 1985 with the word “milieu.” Natarajan competed in the National Spelling Bee twice before becoming the 1985 champion.

- Daily Herald -

Baseball: Robertson finishes South Elgin’s regional championship win over St. Charles North

By: Chris Casey
Date: May 31, 2025



“Grinder.”

The kind of player that South Elgin baseball coach Jim Kating wanted to take the ball in a big game for his Storm against St. Charles North was on the mound Saturday morning.

Jacob Robertson had no hesitation. With a one-run lead and South Elgin three outs away from a regional championship, Robertson wanted the ball.

The junior right-hander tossed his only 1-2-3 inning of the day to finish off his complete game in a 4-3 victory over St. Charles North to win the Class 4A Batavia regional championship.

Kating referenced a season-ending loss a year ago to the North Stars in the sectional semifinals as even more motivation for his team.

“He’s a grinder,” Kating said of Robertson. “He’s done a great job for us all year on the mound. He wanted to throw against these guys and he more than delivered.”

“They got us last year by one run and the kids were looking forward to this opportunity and playing them again.”

After allowing a run in each of the previous three innings, Robertson took the mound against the heart of the North Stars order in the seventh. After inducing a ground ball back to him for an out to start the inning, Robertson finished off the game with back-to-back strikeouts after striking out just one hitter over the first six innings.

He finished with eight hits allowed but forced St. Charles North to strand seven runners on base.

“I know I have a great defense behind me. They have been doing it all year,” Robertson said. “I absolutely wanted to finish [the game]. It’s great knowing my coaches and teammates have all of the confidence in the world in me to go out there and get the job done.”

“Jacob is a guy that you just always have confidence in,” said centerfielder Connor Lund, who scored two of the four South Elgin runs. “He’s just ready to go every time he’s out there. If you see him on the bus before the game, he’s locked in. You talk to him and he’s all friendly, but when it comes game time, he’s ready to go.”

South Elgin (23-11) took advantage of a North Stars error in the third to take a 2-0 lead, but St. Charles North (22-13) battled back with runs in the fourth and fifth — the latter on a two-out RBI double from Mason Netcel to tie the game.

The Storm capitalized on another St. Charles North error with two outs in the fifth to score two more runs, which included Robertson helping his own cause with an RBI single that proved to be the game-winning knock.

“We had been playing so well,” St. Charles North coach Todd Genke said. “You have to tip your cap to [Robertson] for keeping us off balance for a lot of today. We hit some balls well and they made some plays and that’s baseball. We just have to do a better job in controlling the controllables. You have to give [South Elgin] credit. They played hard and made the plays when they needed to. We had our chances and that’s all you can ask for but just didn’t come through and that’s the story of the game.”

Keaton Reinke took the loss for the North Stars, allowing four runs (one earned) on four hits while striking out nine. Reinke also doubled in the sixth and came around to score to get St. Charles North back within one, but Robertson retired the final four batters of the game to seal the victory.

Matt Kelly added a pair of RBI singles for the North Stars in the loss.

South Elgin will take on Bartlett (19-16-1) at 2 p.m. Wednesday in the 4A Willowbrook sectional semifinals. Bartlett knocked off top-seeded Willowbrook, 8-1, on Saturday.

- Chicago Tribune / The Courier News - Loyola recruit Anna Kiel inches closer to 500 career strikeouts. But what about her hitting? 'Even more impressed.'

By: Rick Armstrong

Date: May 29, 2025



South Elgin's Anna Kiel (20) throws a pitch against Larkin in the first inning of an Upstate Eight Conference game in South Elgin on April 21, 2025.

To be blunt, the numbers for South Elgin senior Anna Kiel are downright gaudy.

But which statistics put up this season by the four-year varsity standout and Loyola recruit are more impressive, those for her pitching or her hitting?

Take your pick, according to senior catcher Chloe Ricard.

"With Anna, you can call any pitch in any count," Ricard said. "I have a lot of confidence in her to throw whatever she wants and she has the confidence in me to call whatever I feel is best.

"But I think I'm more impressed with her hitting, which is remarkable. Usually, the standard is how far above .200 you are hitting, and she's hitting above .500."

On Wednesday, it had to be Kiel's work in the circle.

The hard-throwing left-hander fired a three-hit shutout for the fifth-seeded Storm in a 4-0 shutout of 11th-seeded Addison Trail in a Class 4A South Elgin Regional semifinal.

Kiel (14-3), the Upstate Eight West's pitcher of the year, struck out 13 and walked none to lead her team to a familiar place in the postseason.

Her teammates put up three runs in the second inning, featuring a triple by sophomore left fielder Kaidence Rumachik and RBI singles by sophomore first baseman Jenna Sheehan and senior third baseman Adriana Jimenez. All three, along with Ricard, were all-conference selections.

South Elgin (27-4), which set the program's single-season record for wins, advanced to a 4:30 Friday regional final against third-seeded Lake Park (21-7), the Storm's nemesis.



South Elgin's Anna Kiel (20) pumps her fist after a strikeout against Larkin in the seventh inning of an Upstate Eight Conference game in South Elgin on April 21, 2025.

“Knowing every pitch matters is something I’m going to focus on,” Kiel said. “I’m trying not to focus on the pressure but trusting the people around me, knowing we can get it done if we play together.”

“We’re definitely going into the game hungry on Friday.”

Kiel was delighted to get in game Wednesday’s game, especially after the area was hit with plenty of rain in the morning. South Elgin coach Brad Reynard said the U-46 grounds crew deserved an assist.

It allows his ace to have the day off Thursday and be available for the final without pitching two days in a row. Each of the past three years, the Lancers have ended the Storm season, twice in regional championship games and her sophomore season in a sectional semifinal.

Kiel's 13 strikeouts Wednesday pushed her career total to 494.



South Elgin's Anna Kiel (20) takes the ball from catcher Chloe Ricard against West Aurora in the first inning of an Upstate Eight Conference game in South Elgin on April 21, 2025.

"She'll take one strikeout Friday as long as she gets the 'W' against Lake Park," Reynard said. "She's ready to go now. Anna doesn't get too high or too low. It's hard to read emotions sometimes from her."

Kiel had a single in three at-bats and carries a .558 average (43-for-77) with seven doubles, one home run and 23 RBIs, one of seven players on the team with 20 or more RBIs.

"She's just locked, hitting laser line drives, finding the hole between shortstop and third base and hitting the left-center gap," Reynard said. "This year, she told me, 'One of my goals is not to strike out.'"

Close. So far, Kiel has struck out only once in 86 plate appearances.

Kiel credited her work with New Lenox Lightning coach Jim Abbott and Phil Latoria of St. Charles for improving her hitting and St. Charles-based Jill Waldron on her pitching.



South Elgin's Adriana Jimenez (9) pats pitcher Anna Kiel (20) against West Aurora in the seventh inning of an Upstate Eight Conference game in South Elgin on April 21, 2025.

"I think it helps me as a batter being a pitcher," Kiel said. "I'm not guessing, I kind of know what they might be thinking throwing to me."

Loyola coaches will let her do both, she said, if she earns it.

"Offensively, she probably doesn't get as much praise as she should," Reynard said. "But for me, knowing she's going to be in the circle is hard to beat.

"I don't want to say she's the best player I've ever had, but she never ceases to amaze me and I've been doing this 25 years. It's like talking to an adult."