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U-46 leaders discuss rolling out dual language in high schools

BY MADHU KRISHNAMURTHY



Juan Perez works with his first grade dual language students on how to properly shake hands and look someone in the eye at Otter Creek Elementary School in Elgin. Elgin Area School District U-46 officials are working toward rolling out the dual language program in high schools next year. **Rick West | Staff Photographer**

Elgin Area School District U-46's officials Monday night discussed the roll out of dual language programming in high schools next school year.

"This has been a multiyear journey to get this to high school," Elgin Area School District U-46 CEO Tony Sanders said.

Sanders added, when the first generation of U-46 graduates who have gone through the dual language program enter the workforce "they will be unstoppable."

U-46's 80:20 Dual Language Program serves Spanish-speaking English learners from prekindergarten through eighth grades at 33 elementary schools, including two early learning centers, and five middle schools.

It offers a bilingual educational environment in which students are taught literacy and academic content in English and Spanish starting in kindergarten, where 80 percent of classroom instruction is in Spanish and 20 percent in English. As students move up in grades, English instruction increases by 10 percent per grade until both languages reach parity by third grade.

Its goal is to foster bilingualism, bi-literacy and multiculturalism, which officials say has proved to help students improve academically, while incorporating awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity.

The program was implemented in eighth grade this school year, and will be rolled out at the district's five high schools starting with 731 incoming ninth-graders in the 2018-19 school year, officials said.

"This is the logical next step for our dual language students," said Annette Acevedo, director of English Language Learners programs. "We feel confident that this is equity work at its finest."

Acevedo said research has shown dual language learning increases students' cognitive development and results in higher student engagement.

She added, the demand for bilingual workers -- most notably in the finance and health care industries -- in the U.S. is rising, according to one study.

High school students in the dual language program will not be able to enroll in the specialized academy programs offered at each high school. Dual language students will be enrolled in seven classes like their peers in the academies. They will be required to take four years of Spanish language arts and four years of English language arts. Coursework includes Advanced Placement offerings in Spanish, officials said.

Officials said they identified educators with high school background and expertise to develop the dual language coursework. They also will be selecting and recruiting teachers with the appropriate credentials to teach the courses.

School board member Jeanette Ward said she is concerned the dual language program targets Spanish speaking students and that it prolongs dependence on Spanish.

Board member Traci O'Neal Ellis said developing a bilingual workforce with an understanding and appreciation for other cultures is important.

"From an HR perspective, this makes our students highly competitive," she added.

Parent Kate Thommes lauded the district for adapting to a changing world. Her daughters went through the dual language program at Channing and Otter Creek elementary schools, both in Elgin. One daughter now is a student in Streamwood High School's World Languages and International Studies Academy and on track to take Advanced Placement Spanish classes and preparing to earn a Seal of Biliteracy, she said.

"U-46 has students that represent over 90 languages and even more countries," she said. "Hiding from the global society doesn't do anybody any good. The global society is coming to us."

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South Elgin rolls past Hampshire

BY STEVE NEMETH

South Elgin's third-quarter surge followed by raining 3-pointers proved to be too much for Hampshire in Monday's opening round of pool play in Sycamore's 55th edition of the Leland G. Strombom Holiday Tournament.

South Elgin's 89-61 victory in the boys basketball season opener for both sides began with a back-and-forth first quarter before a lack of luck or an invisible lid on the Hampshire basket created a gap. The Storm ended the half with a 3-pointer for a 41-30 intermission edge, then utilized its height advantage to double its lead by the end of the third quarter, and had four different players drain 3-pointers in the fourth as part of 13-3 advantage in treys.

"Having multiple guys hit threes was an example of how we looked for the open guy," South Elgin coach Brett Johnson noted. "The chemistry from our summer games came to fruition in that they understand it doesn't matter who gets it done as long as South Elgin wins. Once we got some jitters out, they executed the game plan flawlessly and pushed the ball."

The Storm's 6-foot-5 Vince Miskiewicz had two of his three dunks to electrify the third-quarter charge as South Elgin built a 27-point lead before Hampshire closed with a mini 7-2 run.

"Those dunks felt great because they helped get the crowd going and gets new life into the bench," Miskiewicz said. "We've really got great team camaraderie and everyone looks for the open guy."

Drake Montgomery's assist led to Miskiewicz's third slam as part of his game-high 19 points which was followed by the last of reserve Jace Warrick's four 3-pointers for 12 points. Noah Rohr had 13 while Montgomery added 11.

"Drake stood out as a point guard in the way he distributed the ball so well," Johnson noted.

"That's my job since I'm surrounded by good shooters," Montgomery added.

Hampshire was led by J.D. Shaw's team-best 12 with 10 points from both Collin Woods and Drew Dalby. At 6-5, Dalby was the only Whip-Pur over 6-foot-3 compared to the Storm boasting five at that height or higher.

"Give them credit, they simply didn't miss quality chances," Hampshire coach Ben Whitehouse acknowledged. "We scored 61 and yet I believe we missed a dozen layups, so there a positives for us to build on. Perhaps their length was a factor, yet we didn't really take that many bad shots; we just didn't get finishes. If those go in, we can set up defensively instead of getting beat in transition. Guys came off the bench ready to go, so finishing stronger or with more confidence around the basket can make a big difference for us."