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U46 won't expand dual-credit program

By RAFAEL GUERRERO

A program that allows local high school seniors to earn credits at Elgin Community College has been successful in its first year, School District U46 officials said. Still, they're reluctant to expand the program until more time has passed and they're able to collect more data.

For now, the number of students participating in the dual credit program will remain capped at 45, school officials said this week.

This school year, 44 U46 seniors enrolled in Accelerate College, the first year of a partnership between the Elgin-area school district and community college. Currently, only incoming seniors can apply for the program, though the agreement allows for an expansion that would allow 45 incoming juniors to participate.

But Terri Lozier, the district's assistant superintendent of secondary schools and equity, said any expansion would have to wait.

"Before we suggest or even move forward with the junior/senior program at ECC, we want to make sure that we have the senior program under control," she said.

So far, the results have been promising, officials said.

At Monday's U46 school board meeting, Lozier and Chris Boden, U46 lead counselor, gave an update on the first group of Accelerate College students, noting the group had a combined GPA of 3.42 in the first semester. They earned a combined 633 college credits.

"ECC was — needless to say — quite pleased with how well our students did first semester," Boden said.

Each of the five U46 high schools sent between 7 and 11 students to ECC.

Boden said the students and their families saved a combined \$79,125 in college tuition and fees during the first semester.

There will be few changes in next school year's program, officials said, though, tuition will increase next school year from \$125 to \$129 per credit hour.

Under Accelerate College, U46 pays for tuition and course fees, while students and their families pay for books and U46 instructional fees. The district covers about \$3,300 per semester for a student taking 12 credit hours, and over \$4,300 for a student taking 16 credit hours, according to district records.

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A keeper at sweeper: Kylie Graves inspired by brother to form Best Buddies chapter at Elgin

By C.R. WALKER



Elgin sweeper Kylie Graves, right, blocks a pass by St. Charles East's Renee Unterberg during a game last season. (Jon Langham/The Courier-News)

As a three-sport athlete, Elgin senior Kylie Graves has turned many teammates into friends.

She knows how fortunate she is, but also recognizes some of her peers aren't as fortunate.

As the leader of Elgin's defense at sweeper, Graves possesses aggressiveness, strength and stellar vision as well as good heading ability, courage and a drive to win. Off the field, she's a mover and shaker.

Graves and her sister Emily founded a Best Buddies chapter at Elgin to help build one-to-one friendships between students with and without intellectual and developmental disabilities. These relationships help erase the invisible line that often separates students with such disabilities.

The sisters were inspired by their brother Braden, Emily's fraternal twin, who has Down syndrome but doesn't allow it to deter him from being involved in athletics and activities at the school. He serves as the manager for the girls basketball, girls volleyball and girls soccer teams.

"We realized that Braden's super involved here at school, but other kids aren't getting that same experience," Kylie Graves said. "With Best Buddies we're able to get more kids involved, to go to school events and to meet more people.

"It's actually been very successful as a first-year club. The higher-ups told us we're one of the more successful clubs here."

Off the field, Graves hopes to become a neuroscientist who helps improve the lives of those with Down syndrome and other disabilities. On the soccer field, she feeds off the adrenaline rush she gets from being on the back line.

Soccer also is her preferred sport, ahead of volleyball and basketball.

"I've spent the most time in soccer so it's my favorite," she said. "I love the fact that I can see the entire field and that when it comes down to the last person before the goalie, it's all up to me. I have to make sure it doesn't get to the goalie so I'm responsible for backing everybody up. I like that role and I talk a lot on the field."

While she might be in back, she's at the forefront of motivating her teammates.

"She's always pushing everyone, encouraging and motivating them," Elgin coach Alicia Knoll said. "She's a great person, always working hard to get better and be the best player she can be, and as an athlete she makes everyone better."

As a freshman, Graves expected to be a midfielder, but Knoll desperately needed a sweeper.

"I trained her a bit," Knoll said. "She's very coachable and took the change like a champ. She always puts the team first. We knew she could be successful in this role, and she took it and ran with it."

Surprisingly, Graves led the Maroons last year with eight goals for a 12-win team despite not playing in a glamorous forward position. She also received all-conference honors.

"She's a good person to run forward to take corner kicks," Knoll said. "She's always in the mix, and she became our leading scorer on corner kicks and penalty kicks because of her composure."

Composure is definitely one of Graves' many qualities.

"I've been in those situations so many times that it doesn't bother me anymore," she said. "It's my job to stay calm and keep my teammates calm. As I've grown, I've increased my role as a leader. I kind of feel like I'm doing my job like I'm supposed to do."