

Press Clippings 08/09/2019 - 08/12/2019

---Daily Herald---08/12/2019

Summer construction projects transform schools before classes begin

By: Madhu Krishnamurthy



Library renovations at Bartlett, Larkin and South Elgin high schools involve reconfiguring them to incorporate new technology and more collaborative spaces. The total renovation cost for all three schools is \$2.1 million. Pictured here is South Elgin's finished library.



A rendering of Vernon Hills High School's expansion involving eight new classrooms, a larger cafeteria, a second gymnasium, a new dance studio and a science and technology lab.



Construction of a new aquatic center at Libertyville High School is nearly complete and is projected to be ready in time for classes. A dedication/celebration is being planned.



Construction of a new aquatic center at Libertyville High School is nearly complete and is projected to be ready in time for classes. A dedication/celebration is being planned. *Courtesy of Libertyville-Vernon Hills Area High School District 128*

Students across the region will return to new additions, modernized learning centers, and other facility improvements as school construction projects wrap up before classes start this month.

Here's a sampling of what some districts have been doing over the summer:

U-46

Major construction projects at Elgin Area School District U-46 schools include library renovations at Bartlett, Larkin and South Elgin high schools; installing a new track at South Elgin High School; and playground replacements at Coleman and Hillcrest elementary schools, both in Elgin, and Sycamore Trails Elementary in Bartlett.



Library renovations at Bartlett, Larkin (pictured here) and South Elgin high schools involve reconfiguring them to incorporate new technology and more collaborative spaces.

High school libraries are being reconfigured to include more collaborative spaces and to incorporate technology, such as media boards, small touch screens for catalog systems, Chromebook charging stations, 3-D printers, interactive monitors for small and large groups, and speaker systems. The total renovation cost for all three schools is \$2.1 million.

"It's completely revamping the existing library," said Sheila Downs, U-46 director of plant operations. "It's really addressing the bulky, the antiquated existing furniture to try to encourage the kids to be more collaborative."

Work started over spring break and will be completed before the first day of instruction on Wednesday, Aug. 14.



At South Elgin High School, workers have installed a permanent stadium press box, LED lights around the perimeter of the football field and renovated the track. The project cost is \$1.4 million.

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"They have always had to play earlier because they didn't have lighting," Downs said. "(Now) they can start having some night events."

The running track at Larkin High in Elgin also is being renovated for \$730,000.

New intercom systems addressing the needs of those who are audio/visually impaired are being installed at Abbott Middle School in Elgin, Clinton and Willard elementary schools in South Elgin, and Elgin High School. The \$4.1 million cost includes some fire alarm replacement.

There also will be scrolling boards installed in classrooms and hallways, and alert lights installed along the perimeter of the buildings, hallways, common areas and in select classrooms, with specialized services for students with auditory problems.

Workers are repainting the entire buildings of Streamwood High School, and Washington Elementary School in Elgin and Hanover Countryside Elementary School in Streamwood.

Gym floors at Bartlett and South Elgin high schools and Kenyon Woods Middle School in South Elgin are being sanded and refinished for \$138,000. South Elgin High also is getting new logos for its school mascot, Storm, which it has never had before, Downs said.

Huntley 158

Huntley High School's Performing Arts Center is being expanded to include a black box theater with flexible seating for 120 to 150 people, larger band room to accommodate 140 percussion instruments and standing room for 170 marching band students, a scene shop, and a lobby with ticketing booth.

Construction on the project -- estimated to cost \$4.4 million -- is expected to begin this month. It is being paid for with remaining funds from a state capital grant received years ago, which covered the previous addition/renovations at the high school.

The improvements will support the high school's new Fine Arts Academy launched last fall. Students enrolled in the academy can immerse themselves in a Conservatory Path -- music performance, theater, or visual arts -- and participate in a series of courses and extracurricular activities to gain well-rounded arts education.

District 128

Construction of a new aquatic center at Libertyville High School is nearly complete and is projected to be ready by Aug. 19.



Construction of a new indoor swimming pool at Libertyville High School is nearing completion.

Meanwhile, the old indoor swimming pool at Libertyville High is being remodeled and turned into space for physical education and extracurricular programs.

Additionally, an expansion is under way at sister school Vernon Hills High. Eight new classrooms, a larger cafeteria, a second gymnasium, a new dance studio and a science and technology lab are in the works.



A rendering shows the exterior of a new indoor aquatic center at Libertyville High School.

The projects are expected to cost \$30.3 million -- not including the \$21.5 million cost of that new pool at Libertyville High.

Construction at Libertyville High could be completed in spring 2020. Vernon Hills High's expansion could wrap up in fall 2020.

Indian Prairie 204

Work to cool 19 of Indian Prairie Unit District 204's elementary schools built without air conditioning -- prompted by a September 2013 heat wave that led to cancellation of classes for "heat days" -- is nearly complete.

Only the library media centers in the schools originally built without cooling systems will remain without air conditioning, said Todd DePaul, director of building operations.

The \$3.7 million project is continuing the gradual process of adding air conditioning to classrooms by installing large condensers atop school roofs. By the time library media centers are complete next year -- at an estimated cost of \$3.3 million -- the total project will have cost \$14.7 million.

The district serves students in Naperville, Aurora, Plainfield and Bolingbrook.

Naperville 203

The learning commons library areas at three schools in Naperville Unit District 203 are being modernized at an estimated cost of \$679,828.

Work includes new technology, furniture and flooring at Beebe and Scott elementary schools in Naperville, as well as Kennedy Junior High in Lisle. Each learning commons has been reorganized into a new layout, with new glass walls dividing various areas for student work.

The work is part of an ongoing process of updating learning commons spaces throughout the district.

St. Charles 303

A roughly \$50 million plan to consolidate and update St. Charles Unit District 303 middle school facilities is wrapping up.

Haines is now closed, Wredling underwent improvements in the past couple years, and a major expansion and renovation project at Thompson is nearing completion, just in time to absorb additional students for the 2019-20 school year.

The east wing of 705 W. Main St. was torn down last summer, and infrastructure has been updated throughout the building. The project includes the addition of 11 science labs, 31 classrooms, an auxiliary gym, a new track and field and an expanded cafeteria. The plan is being paid for through a state grant, existing district funds, working cash bonds and future savings, according to district officials.

The school board now is debating the future of the now-vacant Haines building at 305 S. Ninth St.

Stevenson 125

A roughly \$27 million, three-story expansion of Stevenson High School's East Building will be completed before the school year begins.

Work began in October 2017. The addition stands on what was a grassy area near the eastern edge of the sprawling campus in Lincolnshire.

The expansion adds 56,800 square feet to the 870,000-square-foot school -- already one of the largest in the suburbs.

The building includes classrooms, breakout spaces for small groups, science labs and an educational courtyard for special education and fine arts programs. Plans also include a

garden and greenhouse on the roof that will be used by science, art, foods and special education classes, as well as other educational amenities.

Officials opted to expand the building to accommodate rising enrollment. The student population is expected to be 4,600 by the 2024-25 term, up from about 4,300 last school year.

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Officials gearing up as school year starts this week

By: Rafael Guerrero



Students and staff at Huff Elementary School in Elgin watch as the flag is raised on the first day of school in 2018.

The expansion of Chromebook computers in the classrooms, the completion of construction and maintenance projects, and first-week jitters of drivers navigating school zones await students, families and staff at Elgin-area schools as the new school year nears.

Classes at District 300 begin Tuesday, followed by District U46 and Central School District 301 Wednesday. Combined, the three districts have more than 60,000 students.

U46 students in grades 5 through 8 are the next in line to receive Chromebook notebook computers as the district continues the rollout to younger students now that all high school students and some middle schoolers already have them. The computers can be used in class and at home for the duration of the school year.

U46s English/Spanish dual-language program will expand into 10th grade this year. The expansion means all but the two highest grade levels in U46s K-12 system have some form of dual-language instruction.

“More than 11,000 U46 students are on their way to becoming bilingual and biliterate, better ready to build careers in a global society,” according to a news release from the school district.

Maintenance or improvement projects done over the summer should be complete by the first day of class, officials said. Among the U46 projects completed are the installation of a new press box and lights at South Elgin High School’s athletic complex, a new track at Larkin High School and an electrical main/domestic water replacement at Elgin High School.

District 301 Superintendent Todd Stirn said Central High School in Burlington and Prairie View Grade School in Elgin received new roofing and air conditioning was installed in the gymnasium of Prairie Knolls Middle School in Elgin. Central High's first floor was renovated and more lab space created.

At D300, some of the projects completed include the concrete replacement and sealcoating throughout its schools, bathroom renovations and floor replacement at Carpentersville Middle School and mechanical replacement and media center renovations at Dundee-Crown High School, according to an update Superintendent Fred Heid posted on the district's website.

District officials advised families and other drivers to use caution in the first few days of the school year when driving through school zones, approaching crosswalks used by students, and following school buses. They reminded drivers to never pass a school bus when its stop arm is extended.

"Additionally, it may take a few weeks for traffic patterns to adjust to the start of a new school year," an online message said. "Buses, student drivers and parents will increase traffic so please allow yourself additional time each morning to ensure a safe and stress-free commute."

Road closures and construction of a roundabout at Route 47 and Plato Road are expected to increase afternoon travel times for buses going to and from the east side of the district, which includes Elgin. Buses will be expected to take detours until the roundabout is completed in November, officials said online.

"Following the first full week of busing, our (transportation) department will analyze the continued impact of the road closure and adjust routes accordingly," the district update said.

Elgin police Lt. Jeff Adams advised drivers with or without children in schools to use "common sense" in the first days of the school year. Parents and their children will take some time to get into the routine of picking up and dropping off at schools or bus stops, maneuvering in and around schools.

"Be more attentive to your surroundings, limit distractions — that's for both the kids and parents," he said. "A lot of the kids will be distracted because of electronic devices or by their friends. A lot of times drivers may not notice this as they enter a school zone, where there can be unpredictability."

"The biggest thing I could say for all school-related safety tips is exercise patience," Adams said.

Eight U46 schools will have new principals when classes start

By: Rafael Guerrero



Coleman



Van Deusen

Eight District U46 schools will have new principals when students attend their first day of classes Wednesday.

The administrative changes have been made at one high school, one middle school and six elementary schools, district officials said in a news release. Six of the eight are U46 employees moving to new positions.

Charlotte Coleman, principal of Nature Ridge Elementary School in Bartlett since 2013, will take over as principal of Kimball Middle School in Elgin.

Coleman was hired by U46 in 2005 as a teacher, and was assistant principal at Nature Ridge before being promoted, the release said. Coleman started her career as a teacher and curriculum coordinator in the Hattiesburg, Mississippi, school system.

Jennifer Van Deusen, Bartlett High School associate principal since 2014, is the new principal at Streamwood High School.

Van Deusen joined U46 in 2006 as an English teacher at Elgin and South Elgin high schools and later became a dean of students at Bartlett High School.

Hillcrest Elementary assistant principal Cyndi Aleman will replace Coleman as principal of Nature Ridge.

Prior to her three years at Hillcrest in Elgin, Aleman taught at Liberty Elementary School in Bartlett, where she was also part of the summer school program and building committee and worked as a coach, the release said. Before joining U46, Aleman taught at St. Joseph School in Elgin, St. Raymond Catholic School in Mt. Prospect and the Bloomingdale and Palatine school districts.

Joel Pollack has been hired as principal of Creekside Elementary School in Elgin.

Pollack was the associate provost at the University of Chicago, overseeing pre-K-12 education initiatives, the release said. Prior to that, he was the chief education officer for Acero Schools and from 2013 to 2017, deputy superintendent of instruction for North Chicago Community Unit School District 187. From 2008 to 2013, he held leadership positions at the Academy for Urban School Leadership.

Tiffany Robinson, assistant principal at Hilltop Elementary in Elgin, is the new principal of Lowrie Elementary School, also in Elgin.

Robinson has more than 18 years of experience in education as a teacher, teacher leader and administrator in U46 and other school systems, the release said. At Hilltop, she was a member of the District Student Conduct Committee and Dual Language Advisory Committee.

Liberty Elementary Assistant Principal Stephanie Sylvester has been promoted to principal.

Sylvester, a 12-year U46 veteran, was assistant principal at the Bartlett school for two school years and before that was a U46 peer consultant teacher from 2013 to 2017, a K-6 special education resource teacher at Lowrie Elementary from 2008 and 2013, an extraordinary needs middle school teacher at Canton Middle School in Streamwood, and a special education middle school teacher at Kenyon Woods Middle School in South Elgin, the release said.

Noe Velazquez, assistant principal at Highland Elementary in Elgin for two years, is the new principal of Lords Park Elementary in Elgin.

From 2009 to 2017, Velazquez taught science at Ellis Middle School in Elgin and has been a facilitator for the U46 Parent Leadership Institutes since 2013, the release said. From 2004 to 2007, he taught at-risk students at Elgin High School. His education career started as a bilingual paraprofessional in School District 300.

Adam Zurko has been hired as principal of Wayne Elementary School in Wayne. Zurko worked for Rochelle Elementary School District 231 as a district administrator and before that as an elementary school principal. He was also an elementary school principal in Meridian District 223 from 2006 to 2011 and is a past elementary school teacher in Kaneland School District 302 and the Cherry Creek School District in Greenwood Village, Colorado.

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\$50,000 or \$35 million: Which schools got the most in new state funding

By: Jake Griffin



New kindergarten teacher Laura Pellegrino sorts books as she sets up her classroom at the Round Lake Unit District 116 Pleviak Kindergarten Center in Lake Villa. The district lowered kindergarten class sizes and hired more teachers with some of the \$5.3 million it received in additional state funding.

New students won't be the only fresh faces showing up at Round Lake Unit District 116's Pleviak Kindergarten Center next week.

The school in Lake Villa is getting several new kindergarten teachers thanks to the state's new education funding formula that has added millions of dollars to District 116's coffers since it was put in place a year ago.

"When the money started coming in, we had a plan," said Donn Mendoza, superintendent of the school district with nearly 7,000 students and 10 schools. "We are adding about 40 additional positions this year in areas where we found the most benefit, and hiring more kindergarten teachers allows us to lower the size of our classes."

District 116 got an additional \$5.3 million from the state in the first year of the new funding system, which will also allow it to add guidance counselors, special education instructors, bilingual educators and instructional coaches.

Others that saw substantial funding increases are **Elgin Area School District U-46**, the state's second largest school district, \$35.8 million; West Aurora Unit District 129, \$10.3 million; West Chicago Elementary District 33, \$9.0 million; and East Aurora Unit District 131, \$6.6 million.

All schools across the state received more state aid last year, but the size of the increase varied a lot. Libertyville High School District 128 and Rosemont Elementary District 78 each received less than \$50,000 in additional education fund state aid last year.

The new state formula was intended to increase funding for school districts with low property tax collections, which is where most schools receive the majority of their revenue.

"The healthier the finances of the district, the less likely they are to see any significant increase to their state funding," said Michael Jacoby, executive director of the Illinois Association of School Business Officials.

School districts that already relied heavily on state aid were going to see even more money through the new formula.

More than 65% of District 116's \$51.4 million education fund came from state aid in 2018, according to Illinois State Board of Education financial records.

A Daily Herald analysis of 96 suburban school districts' financial reports showed less than 18% of the average school district's education fund came from state aid in 2018. The analysis also showed the 96 suburban districts combined received more than \$1 billion in education fund state aid last year, \$155 million more than the previous year.

Queen Bee Elementary District 16 in Glendale Heights received 34.2% of its education fund revenue from the state in 2018, up from 31.9% the year before. The four-school district receive \$1.1 million more in 2018 from the state through the new funding formula, and officials there said it was used to enhance existing programs and improve the district's commitment to its special needs community.

"We invested this money in established and proven instructional practices," said Superintendent Joe Williams. "We count on it as we've always counted on state aid -- we budgeted conservatively. This is not found money."

School districts are divided into four different funding tiers based on their "financial adequacy." Most suburban schools are not on the lowest tier that sees the greatest benefit from the new state funding method. The median increase to the suburban districts' education fund state aid was a little more than \$800,000, according to the analysis.

District U-46 is on the lowest tier and received a total of \$177.3 million for its education fund in state aid last year. Spokeswoman Mary Fergus said the state's spotty history of delivering on promised funding might make some school districts gun-shy about planning for the anticipated windfall.

Fergus said U-46 used some of the new state revenue to hire guidance counselors in its middle schools, positions that had been vacant for more than a decade. Additionally, high school students and some middle-schoolers in advanced math classes received Chromebooks from the district last year. The goal this year is to outfit all students beginning in fifth grade with the devices, she said.

Northwest Suburban High School District 214 received \$3.1 million more in education fund revenue, and Palatine-Schaumburg High School District 211 received nearly \$1.9 million more.

In all, the districts in the analysis reported more than \$286.7 million in new education fund revenue in 2018 combined from all sources. The additional state aid from the new funding formula accounted for 54.3% of that new revenue, according to the analysis.

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10 questions with ... SD U46's bookkeeper and receptionist

By: Rafael Guerrero



Kelli Siewert works as a bookkeeper for School District U46's food services department in Elgin.

"10 Questions with ..." is a Courier-News feature in which reporter Rafael Guerrero interviews someone in the Elgin area we think you should know and finds out a little more about what makes them who they are.

Kelli Siewert

Age: 53

Hometown: Chicago

Current town: Streamwood

Job/employer: Bookkeeper/receptionist for School District U46's food services department. She is based in the food services building/commissary on 1150 Bowes Road, which opened last year.

Education: Associate's degree from Moraine Valley Community College; management/accounting classes at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale.

Marital status/children: Married for 30 years, two adult sons.

What would you say about working at U46 that perhaps people have never heard before?

A year ago, the food and nutrition services department relocated to 1150 Bowes and we were able to start a garden this year.

What does your job entail?

My responsibilities started with keeping the department's financial records, accounts payable and receivables as well as monthly reports. Additionally, I order supplies, including uniforms, for the department of near 200. I soon will be responsible for reconciling the school cafes' banking accounts.

The position expanded to include receptionist duties when the department moved to the new building. Being the first to greet our guests, I have many opportunities to interact with district staff, families, vendors and contractors. I often comment I have the best seat in the house with huge, lovely windows.

What's the most common call you get from parents?

From families, the most frequent calls I take are either for free and reduced lunch application assistance or for assistance in meal account transfers or refunds.

Is there any type of call you that is difficult to answer?

Yes. When the question "habla español?" is proposed, I cannot answer with a resounding "yes." The district has been forward thinking in providing bilingual staff in the building, providing dual language starting in kindergarten and posting new positions within the district as Spanish required or preferred.

To avoid becoming obsolete, I occasionally listen to Spanish-language tapes and have attended conversational Spanish classes offered at the Gail Borden Public Library. Currently, I am looking for more traditional studies — specifically, evening classes — in the Spanish language.

What's the biggest change in school lunches since you were a kid?

The salad bars! We now have salad bars at many of the elementary schools. I could not be more excited to be able to offer students an opportunity to select from an array of colorful, enticing, fresh fruits and vegetables.

What is one thing people would be surprised to learn about you that they may not know?

I'm on the road crew for Voyage, a local classic rock band.

What is the best piece of advice you have ever received?

"Choose joy!" We may not have control of what happens to us in life but we do have control of how we respond.

What is the worst piece of advice you have heard/received?

"Everything in moderation." This idea sounds harmless, carefree and fun, but it is often used as an excuse to do something that may not be the best choice.

Are you currently watching or binging anything on television?

I am a big fan of streaming YouTube. I have learned many things from home repairs, public speaking and goal setting, traveling to living a raw vegan lifestyle.

Do you have a favorite restaurant/s in the Elgin area?

Although I have enjoyed dining with coworkers at Al's Cafe in Elgin, this time of year I would prefer picking up some fresh produce at the farmers market and stop by one of Elgin's many parks for lunch. (If I could expand the boundaries to Hanover Park, I would say Dulce Vida on Irving Park Road.)

Groups provide free backpacks, medical screenings for school

By: Rafael Guerrero



Lizzet Ruiz, left, a medical assistant for Advocate Health, prepares a vaccination for 10-year-old Valeria Galvez on Thursday in a mobile clinic set up outside Elgin High School as part of School District U46's annual back-to-school health fair.

At least 700 backpacks will be distributed free of charge at the Centre of Elgin and Philadelphia Holiness Church this weekend as part of multiple school supply drives, medical clinics and health screenings leading up to the first day of classes next week.

Event organizers said they see a need in the Elgin area to provide some of these materials or services, which can be a financial burden for some families.

Among the events scheduled are:

Philadelphia Holiness Full Gospel Baptist Church, 76 S. Jackson St., Elgin, will give away 200 backpacks filled with school supplies from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday, or while supplies last. It is the second year the event is being held, Pastor Mattie Matthews said, and number being distributed is double what they had last year because there is a community need. Supplies include things like pencils, pens, paper, pencil boxes, crayons, folders and tissue paper. "There used to be a time when teachers could make a difference financially for the children," Matthews said. "But they now have less of a financial ability to do so ... the teachers cannot do this by themselves. We want to help the teachers and ease their burden."

The law firm Lerner and Rowe will host a school supplies giveaway from 9:30 a.m. to noon Sunday at the Schock Centre of Elgin, 100 Symphony Way. According to a news release, 500 backpacks filled with supplies will be handed out. The event will include free snow cones and popcorn, carnival games, photo booths, a DJ and a visit from the Elgin Fire Department, the release said.

Delta Dental of Illinois Foundation will offer free dental exams for children ages 5 and younger from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday at Elgin Community College, 1700 Spartan Drive. The free screenings are part of the foundation's Dentist By 1 program. Children will receive free preventive and diagnostic services, including cleanings, exams, fluoride treatments, sealants and X-rays, as well as oral health kits and supplies. The screening provided will satisfy the state requirement for kindergartners. Making an appointments prior to Saturday is recommended because the of number of walk-in visits they'll be able to accommodate will be limited, a new release said. Go online at dentistby1.com/illinois/events or call 630-718-4957 for an appointment.

Several back-to-school events have already been held, including School District U46's annual health fair Thursday at Elgin High School, where free immunizations, physicals and other medical services were provided to students whose families either have no insurance or are covered by public insurance.

"We have in this area a large population of families with no insurance or limited insurance," said Jeff Judge, U46 health services supervisor. "They may be new to the area, they may be new to the country. This fair not only helps the students be ready for school, but it gets the families acclimated to the health care system."

Karla Gonzalez said her 10-year-old daughter, Valeria Galvez, was vaccinated at the fair Thursday, ensuring immunization records were up-to-date, which is a requirement before the U46 student can head back to school Wednesday.

"I'm glad the district is helping the families out, helping out those who need it," Gonzalez said.

Back-to-school shopping is expensive, and thanks to other events in the area, her daughter also received free shoes and school supplies, Gonzalez said.

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Elgin Area School District U-46 opens doors Aug. 14

Submitted by: Elgin Area School District U-46

Classes resume Wednesday, Aug. 14, for more than 38,000 kindergartners through 12th-graders across Elgin Area School District U-46.

The school year promises continued innovation and excellence, including the district's universal play-based, full-day kindergarten program, the addition of Chromebooks for students starting in fifth grade and, at the high school level, the continued expansion of the award-winning Dual Language program.

"We've been counting down the days until we open our doors to students," said U-46 CEO Tony Sanders. "Our U-46 team -- principals, custodians, bus drivers, teachers, food service providers, administrators, and more -- have been hard at work preparing our buildings, classrooms, curriculum, and resources to serve students and families during the 2019-20 school year."

The district will expand its one-to-one device program with the distribution of Chromebooks to all students in fifth through eighth grades. This follows the distribution of about 14,000 Chromebooks at the onset of the 2018-19 school year to all high schoolers and to middle school students enrolled in specific math classes.

This expanded 1:1 technology program means students across the district in fifth through 12th grade can use their own computers in class and take them home in the evenings to use for homework.

The district's Dual Language program, which moved up to ninth grade last year, will now also be available to 10th-graders at all of the district's five comprehensive high schools.

The plan is to add a grade in each of the subsequent years, maintaining U-46 as home to one of the largest Dual Language programs in the United States. More than 11,000 U-46

students are on their way to becoming bilingual and biliterate, better ready to build careers in a global society.

U-46 will also continue its partnership with Elgin Community College to offer a full-time Dual Credit program for seniors. These students, who must demonstrate certain college readiness benchmark scores for acceptance, take all of their courses at ECC. They earn both high school and college credit for each class. In May 2019, 44 graduating seniors were honored for their participation in this valuable program.

For the fifth year, U-46, in partnership with the community through the Alignment Collaborative for Education, will offer a free career expo for eighth-grade students. Explore 2019: A Community, Curriculum and Career Expo is scheduled for Wednesday, Sept. 11, at the Sears Centre in Hoffman Estates.

It is specifically aimed at educating students about the connection between U-46 middle and high school classes and opportunities that best prepare them for further education and careers following high school graduation.

The eighth-graders will attend Explore 2019 during the school day with their teachers. Parents will be invited to an expo preview from 6 to 8 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 10, at the Sears Centre.

With the support of the Alignment members, Explore gathers local businesses and industry leaders to showcase career options, demonstrate skills used in those fields, and explain what courses will prepare students to work in a particular area.

Explore 2019 also ties into the District's plan to roll out Educational Pathways to incoming freshmen for the 2021-22 school year. These pathways will offer students a creative, supportive environment in smaller learning communities, with access to engaging and relevant coursework.

The specific pathways that will be offered at individual high schools will be presented to the Board of Education this fall.

As part of the #U46FirstDayReady initiative, U-46 has been urging parents to use the last weeks of summer break to ensure their children meet health-related requirements, including having up-to-date physicals and immunization records. Students starting preschool, kindergarten, sixth, ninth, and 12th grades must show proof of meeting specific state health requirements by the first day of school.

The policy aims to ensure a healthy environment for all students. The requirements and necessary forms can be found here and within the menu of the Health Services page on the district website at www.u-46.org.

The district strongly urged families to register their children for the new school year via the online "Parent Portal" on Infinite Campus. But for parents and guardians who needed help, U-46 held a walk-in event in July at the Gail Borden Public Library in Elgin and accepted appointments over the summer at the Educational Services Center and individual school buildings.

Families who still need help registering are encouraged to call the school their child will be attending to set up an appointment.

Students who qualify for bus services can find their bus pickup and drop-off times and locations posted on the Parent Portal under the "Transportation" tab starting Aug. 9.

Families with questions about busing can call the Transportation Department's special "back to school" call center Monday, Aug. 12, and Tuesday, Aug. 13, at (847) 888-5095. It will be open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. both days.

Students enrolled in the district's preschool programs will have their first day of school on Wednesday, Aug. 21.

U-46 serves families in 11 communities: Bartlett, Elgin, Hanover Park, South Elgin, Streamwood and Wayne, as well as portions of Carol Stream, Hoffman Estates, St. Charles, Schaumburg, and West Chicago.

In total, the district encompasses 90 square miles within the Fox River Valley, approximately 45 minutes west of downtown Chicago, and includes communities within Cook, DuPage and Kane counties. Nearly 39,000 pre-K through 12th-graders attend the 57 district schools and programs.

To learn more, visit the U-46 website at www.u-46.org.