

Press Clippings 03/27/20

---Daily Herald---03/27/20

U-46 United aims to support families in need

Submitted by Elgin Area School District U-46

The U-46 Educational Foundation has launched an online fundraiser to support the most vulnerable families within the Elgin Area School District U-46 community and to make sure they have the supplies needed to support their household and families during this unprecedented time.

The foundation, a charitable nonprofit 501(c)3 dedicated solely to supporting U-46 students, teachers and schools, aims to generate funds for family needs during this pandemic, starting with household cleaning and personal hygiene items. The fundraiser at [u-46educationalfoundation.salsalabs.org/u46united/index.html](http://u46educationalfoundation.salsalabs.org/u46united/index.html) also allows donors to raise funds through a social media campaign.

Foundation supporters, community members, parents, clubs, and teams are being asked to support the U-46 community by making a small contribution to the "U-46 United" campaign.

Contributors are encouraged to work together as teams to raise funds and to spread the campaign through their own social networks.

"There is a strong sense of community within our schools," said Foundation President Bud Wilson. "We have seen time and time again that U-46 families look out for each other and take care of each other, and nobody wants to see a family struggle during this crisis. If we can help each other, we will."

Initially, the foundation will add care kits filled with soap, shampoo, toothpaste, laundry and dish detergent, and other household products, to the district's meal distribution sites in an effort to keep households running during this pandemic.

As other needs are identified and donors become available, the foundation will aim to support those additional resources and services.

The U-46 Educational Foundation has jump started the campaign with a \$5,000 grant to add care packages to the district's meal distribution program as quickly as possible.

Wilson noted, "We know that a family in need can't wait a week for our fundraiser to pick up steam, so the Foundation is going to make sure there are funds available immediately."

People wishing to contribute to the U-46 Educational Foundation's "U-46 United" campaign, can visit the Foundation's webpage at www.u-46.org/Foundation and click on the "U-46 United- COVID Relief" link or click on the "How to Help" link from the district's COVID-19 website at www.u-46.org/covid.

U-46 -- through its Food and Nutrition Department and school administrators -- are continuing to make daily prepackaged meals available for pick up at 26 schools across the district.

The meal distribution runs from 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. for families to pickup bags that include free packaged meals (breakfast, lunch, dinner and a snack) for all children under 18. No paperwork needed, no questions asked.

District staff members distributed more than 76,000 meals last week during the first week of school closure. Food distribution has continued during the spring break, the week of March 23, and will continue until school resumes. For a list of sites and more information, visit www.u-46.org/food-distribution on the district's COVID-19 webpage.

Students in need

Sixty-one percent of Elgin Area School District U-46 students come from low-income families, as compared to the state average of 49 percent. To be designated as "low-income," a student must either be receiving public aid, living in substitute care, or living in a household with an annual income less than \$46,435 (\$893 per week) for a family of four.

---The Courier-News---03/27/20

Parents share tips on home schooling

Families adapt to learning outside of the classroom while schools shut down

By: Rafael Guerrero



Deborah Perez homeschools her 4-year-old triplets, seen here, and a 17-year-old from her Elgin home. She has set aside part of her home's basement for a "little classroom" to provide a consistent place for lessons to be held and work done. (Deborah Perez photos)



Some Elgin-area parents who were homeschooling their children before the coronavirus pandemic have tips on routines, online content and other things that should make it easier for parents who are taking on the task while schools are closed.

Thousands of parents were thrust into the unofficial role of teacher this month when schools were shut down in an effort to slow the coronavirus pandemic.

“Everybody is in the same boat right now. It’s not like your school is the only one that closed,” said Susan Russell, of South Elgin.

“I would say homeschooling is difficult in a regular situation,” she said. “When you’re thrust into it in an emergency situation, it is even harder.”

Russell has home-schooled her four children for the last 22 years, something she and her husband, Kane County Coroner Rob Russell, decided to do after their first daughter was born. Their youngest child is now a home-schooled junior in high school.

Russell’s main advice to parents is to develop a routine but to also allow themselves time and creativity. Learning can be done in a series of 30-minute blocks or something similar to a traditional school schedule but it doesn’t have to be, she said.

“It doesn’t have to look like school and (the kids) will still be OK,” she said.

Setting aside part of the home to be the classroom can help as well, said Deborah Perez, who is homeschooling her 4-year-old triplets and 17-year-old daughter.

“We took part of our basement, gathered all our supplies, and set up a little classroom,” she said. “For my oldest daughter, it’s a little different. She just needs a desk and her computer. That’s something for parents to figure out. Kids need consistency and structure, like in a school.”

She hung a poster with messages her triplets saw at the preschool program they took at **Illinois Park Center for Early Learning in Elgin**: eyes watching, ears listening, voices quiet, bodies calm.

Some parents may be juggling their unofficial roles as teachers with work-from-home commitments. Perez said if parents have to take a virtual meeting at some point and cannot watch over their children, work around it.

“School doesn’t have to be from 8 to 2,” she said. “If school has to be from 3 to 7 (p.m.) it can, so long as there is some consistency.”

The internet has made things easier because there are a lot more resources and content available, Russell said. When she started homeschooling her children, she had to flip through catalogs to find materials versus clicking links, she said.

Museums, zoos, libraries and other organizations have free resources available on their websites, and even more so now that schools are closed.

Julie Miller, though, cautioned that so much content can prove overwhelming.

“There was so much out there I didn’t know where to begin,” said Miller, who home-schools her three elementary school-age children. “It’s easy to find stuff, but not easy where to begin.”

Parents should follow any guidance from their school, she said. From there, adults and children can branch out and figure out what works best for them at home.

“My biggest advice is don’t worry how your kid is learning or if your school is doing things differently,” she said.

Students who have limited resources at home or limited internet access can still learn, all three home-school mothers said. Making dinner can be an educational experience given the counting, measuring and calculating are involved, Russell said.

Neighbors may be willing to help out by sharing a Wi-Fi passwords or agreeing to print out materials, Perez said.

Some internet providers are currently assisting low-income families by offering reduced-cost services or adding hotspot locations. Gail Borden Public Library in Elgin and other libraries are keeping Wi-Fi on so it's accessible from their parking lots.

The shelter-at-home and social distancing orders are having an effect on families who were homeschooling before the schools closed, the mothers said. Homeschool co-ops can no longer meet in person, Russell is doing remote learning classes with her Aurora University students in addition to doing home schooling her daughter and Miller's husband works for the airline industry, which has been hit hard by the coronavirus.

"Our kids have been affected by this too," Miller said. "It's not like their world didn't change. They can't do sports, they can't go to their co-op events, and they can't be with their friends. ... They don't get to do what kids normally do."

To avoid burnout, Russell suggested parents take some time during the day to do other activities, like exercising or reading.

"Maybe you watch a video on how to play guitar or 30 minutes on how to do origami," she said. "Try something that you've never done."

Mini-library discovers new use as food pantry

Neighbors find ways to help those in need

By: Rafael Guerrero



The Little Free Library outside Harriet Gifford Elementary School in Elgin has found a secondary use as a makeshift food pantry, filled with donated food free for anyone to take. (Harriet Gifford Elementary)

The Little Free Library outside **Harriet Gifford Elementary School** is usually stocked with books. People drop them off and pick them up as they like.

In the last week, however, it's found a new use.

In addition to books, people have been dropping off bottled water, cans of soup, boxes of pasta and other nonperishable food items free to anyone who needs them, Principal Joe Corcoran said.

"People are creative in how they're helping their neighbors," Corcoran said, describing it as an "act of kindness."

"We didn't ask for it, someone just did it," he said. "I thought it was awesome."

It may have been prompted by the fact that Gifford, located at 240 S. Clifton Ave., is one of the Elgin schools being used by School District U-46 to serve as a grab-and-go meal distribution point for families while schools remain closed through at least April 8.

Corcoran and U-46 used social media pages to thank the anonymous donor or donors.

"Even during these times of uncertainty, the U-46 community looks for ways to help," the district's post said.

"Thank you, neighbor!!" the Gifford post said.

The mini-library at Gifford was built by a Girl Scout and installed a few years ago, Corcoran said. It's one of several set up in the Elgin area, according to the Little Free Library online map, which can be found at <https://littlefreelibrary.org/ourmap/>.

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