

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Virtual Graduation Ceremonies to Celebrate Class of 2020

U-46 to host commencement ceremonies June 13

ELGIN – More than 2,700 students will celebrate their graduation on June 13 as School District U-46 hosts virtual ceremonies for our five high schools. Links to the ceremonies will be shared in advance with families and on District and school websites and social media. The recorded ceremonies will later be posted on those platforms as well.

The U-46 Board of Education, Superintendent Tony Sanders, Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Schools Instruction and Equity Lela Majstorovic, and high school principals are all part of the recorded virtual graduation ceremonies.

“This is not how any of us expected to celebrate the Class of 2020, but we have done our best to make this virtual ceremony meaningful for our graduates and their families,” Superintendent Sanders said. “I am proud of how our seniors have faced this challenge, with resiliency, humor, kindness and understanding. We are celebrating differently this year, but we are still united.”

U-46 usually holds five separate graduation ceremonies on one day at the Sears Centre in Hoffman Estates. Given the social distancing restrictions in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the District followed guidance from local public health departments and regional offices of education in creating a celebration plan that could be accomplished virtually. The District has also set aside funds for the graduating classes to hold an in-person event, determined by the schools, as soon as allowed under social distancing guidelines.

As part of the process, school teams delivered to students their caps and gowns and any associated stoles or cords. The seniors then received instructions on how to upload a photo of themselves in their cap and gown.

Graduation speeches from principals, district administrators, and appointed seniors were recorded on a decorated stage at South Elgin High School. The resulting ceremonies will be streamed at 3 p.m. Saturday, June 13.

For the third year, the District will be honoring 47 seniors who enrolled in the full-time Dual Credit program on the campus of Elgin Community College. 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 the program. The District is expanding the program in the 2020-21 school year to include high school seniors and juniors. The District expects to see its first group of students conferred with both their high school diploma and associate's degree graduate in the Class of 2022.

One of this year's Dual Credit students is Larkin High School's Celina Sarangaya, who will graduate with 26 college credits. She said the biggest draw for her was to save money on college and avoid putting a financial strain on her parents, but she also liked the challenge of taking more rigorous courses and becoming more independent.

The situation became even more challenging after the pandemic forced her to learn and study in a small home shared with nine other family members.

But after earning a 3.7 GPA in the fall, she ended this spring with a 4.0. Once she receives her associate's degree at ECC next year, Sarangaya plans to then attend the University of Illinois, either the Urbana-Champaign or Chicago campus.

"Being in an environment other than my home is a huge motivator, and that was lost during online learning," she said. "So I had to constantly remind myself why school is so important to me: To become a first-generation college student and achieve the life my parents came to America for."

For the fourth year, U-46 will also issue a special honor to graduates who demonstrate a high level of proficiency in one or more languages in addition to English. One hundred and eighty-two members of the Class of 2020 will earn the State of Illinois Seal of Biliteracy and 252 students the Commendation, given to students who have demonstrated significant progress toward achieving a high level of proficiency.

“That's more than 400 awards in seven different languages!” said Jacob VandeMoortel, U-46’s Coordinator for K-12 Social Studies and World Languages, adding that students who earn the Seal qualify for two years of credit in that language at any Illinois post-secondary program.

The Class of 2020 graduates include 20 Superintendent’s Scholarship recipients. The program honors students who are first-generation college students with a \$1,000 scholarship. They are also being featured on the District’s Facebook page and on a [special page](#) in the Class of 2020 section.

One of those Superintendent’s Scholars is Ian Rabanal, who is graduating from Bartlett High School with several other community scholarships and honors from his participation in the BHS band program. He said finishing up his senior year via distance learning was challenging, but had its benefits.

“For students who truly put in the work and tried to keep up during this difficult time, I believe they learned personal responsibility ... communication, organization, and time management skills,” said Rabanal, who is headed to the College of DuPage before pursuing a business management degree at a university.

Fifty-two graduates rank among the top two percent of their graduating class within the five high schools. These students will attend top universities including Northwestern University, the University of Michigan, Carnegie Mellon University, Wake Forest University, and the University of Illinois. The top two percent graduates were honored by the Board of Education on June 1 and are being showcased daily through the month of June on the District’s [Facebook page](#). All profiles also appear on the [Class of 2020 website section](#).

Fhel Vince Mejia, who graduated in the top two percent of his class at Streamwood High School, will be attending Elmhurst College in the fall, majoring in biology and taking with him at least three college credits he earned in his Advanced Placement courses.

“Although this pandemic has hindered an important celebration, all our efforts did not go to waste. We still made it through high school!” Mejia said. “Let us learn from this experience that the world needs people to make a

difference, as we begin our journey to change the world. Let us remember that we are the future.”

Graduation Facts

District Graduation Rate: 83 percent

State Graduation Rate: 86 percent

Total number of graduates: 2,745

Number of Bartlett High School graduates: 592

Number of Elgin High School graduates: 624

Number of Larkin High School graduates: 463

Number of South Elgin High School graduates: 628

Number of Streamwood High School graduates: 438

Total Graduates in the Dual Credit Program: 47

Bartlett High School: 5 students

Elgin High School: 2 students

Larkin High School: 7 students

South Elgin High School: 16 students

Streamwood High School: 17 students

Total Illinois State Seal of Biliteracy: 182

Spanish: 164 students

Polish: 9 students

French: 9 students

Total Commendation Toward Biliteracy: 252

Spanish: 202 students

French: 24 students

Polish: 10 students

German: 3 students

Italian: 1 students

Hindi: 1 students

Arabic: 1 students

Total Top 2 Percent Graduates: 52

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School District 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. More than 38,000 pre-K through 12th graders attend the 57 District schools and programs. To learn more, visit the U-46 [website](#), or like us on [Facebook](#) and follow us on [Twitter](#).