

Press Clippings 07/10/20 to 07/13/20

---Press Clippings---07/13/2020
There are no U-46 related news stories.

---Daily Herald---07/12/2020

Send the kids to school?

Parents, school districts grapple with fall reopening decisions

By: Madhu Krishnamurthy and Marie Wilson



Merced alfaro says though it's a big decision, she is sending her daughter Daniela, 17, a senior at Round Lake High School, to school this fall despite concerns over the coronavirus hitting suburban Latino communities hard.



Merced Alfaro plans to send her daughter Daniela, 17, a senior, to Round Lake High School this fall despite concerns over the coronavirus hitting suburban Latino communities hard.



Steve and Jen Klein of Palatine know it's risky sending their children to school under pandemic conditions but are choosing to do so anyway. Their 8-year-old son Tyler will attend second grader at Kimball Hill Elementary

School in Rolling Meadows, and daughter Trista, 5, will start kindergarten at Virginia Lake Elementary School in Palatine.

After months of lockdowns, masks, social distancing and endless talk of COVID-19 and positivity rates, the time suburban parents have dreaded is nearly here — the start of the school year.

For many, the thought of sending their children to school during an ongoing pandemic could be causing sleepless nights as they watch and wait while their school district grapples with the details of how best to reopen — in-person classes, remote learning or a combination of both based on guidelines from state education and health authorities.

And many suburban districts are leaving it up to those same parents to choose how their children will learn.

“It’s a big decision for all,” said Merced Alfaro, whose youngest daughter, Daniela, 17, will start her senior year at Round Lake High School. “I worry for all the students, not just for my daughter.”

Despite concerns over COVID-19 hitting suburban Latino communities hardest, Alfaro is confident students will learn to be safe if adults set a good example.

“Right now, many parents are ready to start, but it’s a big responsibility for us, the community and the district, too,” she said. “We need to learn how to live with the virus.”

Illinois State Board of Education guidelines allow schools to reopen three ways — entirely in person, fully remote or through a blended learning model.

Many school districts are working on plans using these parameters. Several districts surveyed parents and employees about the options.

Some districts, including **Elgin Area School District U-46**, Barrington Area Unit District 220, Palatine-Schaumburg High School District 211, Palatine Township Elementary District 15, Round Lake Area Unit District 116 and Schaumburg Township Elementary District 54, are considering using that hybrid approach, offering families a choice between virtual learning and in-person classroom instruction with health and safety modifications such as increased sanitizing and required masks, face shields and social distancing.

One factor parents may have to consider is locking into a choice for a semester, trimester or the entire school year.

District 211 Superintendent Lisa Small said the school year would begin Aug. 13 under either the remote-learning or hybrid scenarios. Under the hybrid scenario, a parent may choose to have their child connect to the classroom from home every day.

In U-46, most of the more than 3,000 employees and 13,000 families surveyed overwhelmingly supported a hybrid plan.

“Schools aren’t just about students,” U-46 Superintendent Tony Sanders said. “We can’t serve kids without teachers, paraprofessionals, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, secretaries, nurses ... it doesn’t happen without adults. There is no way to ensure student and staff safety and have in-person instruction every day for all students. At least not at the start of the school year.”

At Palatine District 15, parents are being asked to decide by midnight Friday whether they want to opt-out of in-person instruction and have their children placed in a virtual group.

“This is not going to be a normal school year no matter what parents choose to do,” district spokeswoman Morgan Delack said. “We will be really taking seriously the use of personal protective equipment and face coverings and making sure that our students are wearing them

properly during the school day, because we know social distancing may not be an option for us. We have also purchased disposable masks for visitors and students who come to school without one.”

Parents of young children, such as Steve Klein of Palatine, recognize the risk of sending them to school under such conditions but are choosing to do so anyway.

“My biggest hesitations are the masks,” said Klein, whose 8-year-old son, Tyler, will attend second grade at Kimball Hill Elementary School in Rolling Meadows and daughter, Trista, 5, will start kindergarten at Virginia Lake Elementary School in Palatine. “I am finding it hard to believe that 5-year-olds are going to be able to wear a mask for eight hours a day.”

Despite that, Klein and his wife, Jen, want their children back in school where they will have a more structured learning environment. Klein works full time from home and Jen is a physical therapist. Neither is available nor equipped to supervise their children’s virtual learning at home, he said.

“I’m not a teacher,” Klein said. “I feel like they are more at risk of catching the virus in a school setting ... but realistically we want our lives to go back to as normal as possible. Quite frankly, we are willing to take the risk.”

Others see it differently. Naperville Unit District 203 parent Erin Zimmer says that online learning was a nightmare for her and her kindergartner, even with great teachers who did screencasts, read-alouds, extension work for advanced learners and remediation for kids who needed help.

Still, Zimmer doesn’t believe social distancing or masking regulations will work. She favors keeping students like hers home, unless they need to be in school for a hardship, such as disability or learning disorder or to learn English.

“The thought of trying to explain to my kids why their teacher or a classmate is seriously ill or died because they were exposed to the virus at school is heartbreaking for me to even contemplate,” Zimmer said. “Speaking solely for my own household, I cannot put my children’s teachers or their families in danger. ... I cannot impose such risk on anyone, and if I choose to send my kids to school, then I’ll be doing just that.”

Wheaton Warrenville Unit District 200 has four operating modes that could apply to next year’s learning during Phase 4 of the Restore Illinois plan. Three of the plans are expected to be in use when school resumes, with the fourth — a transition to e-learning at any or all levels — available if made necessary by a rise in COVID-19 cases.

The modes include Plan A: In-person daily instruction for early childhood, elementary and transition students; Plan B: Hybrid learning on a rotating schedule with two cohorts alternating two or three days of in-person and virtual learning each week for middle and high school students; and Plan C: A “Virtual Academy” of complete e-learning for students of any age whose families do not feel comfortable sending them to physical school buildings.

Naperville Unit District 203 and Indian Prairie Unit District 204 in the Naperville and Aurora area are scheduled to release their return-to-school plans during school board meetings Monday night.

District 204 Superintendent Adrian Talley said a group of administrators has engaged teachers, principals and parents to formulate how the next school year will work. The group has talked with its busing company about ways to ensure all children from the same family are on the same bus.

The group also has considered how spaces, such as music rooms or speech tutoring rooms, could be used for classroom education and how many student desks truly can fit in each space, given 6-foot social distancing recommendations.

“The plan is etched in Jell-O right now, not marble,” Talley said. “We have to create a plan that can respond to the changes that come our way.”

---The Courier-News---07/11/2020

Microburst takes down trees and power lines in Elgin, leaves thousands without power

By: Rafael Guerrero



Overnight storms Thursday downed tree limbs and caused power outages along north Douglas Avenue in Elgin's Spring Douglas Historic District.

A microburst downed trees, branches and power lines in Elgin Thursday night, National Weather Service meteorologists said.

Nearly 17,000 ComEd customers in Elgin lost electricity as a result of the strong storm system that hit the area just after 7 p.m. Thursday.

“Based on the damage, it’s a good estimate the wind gusts that went through Elgin were 50 to 60 mph at least,” National Weather Service meteorologist Rafal Ogorek said. At nearby DuPage Airport, gusts as high as 48 mph were recorded.

A microburst is a small, localized downburst of sinking air in a thunderstorm that can cause extensive damage through rain or wind. Microbursts tend to be no more than 2.5 miles in size, Ogorek said.



The storm that moved through Elgin Thursday night took down a massive tree and power lines near a home at the corner of Prospect Avenue and Seneca Street.

It's believed another microburst occurred in the northern suburb of Libertyville.

Thursday's storms came in from the southwest and caused the most serious damage in the neighborhoods surrounding the downtown area, according to an Elgin news release. Fire Chief Robb Cagann said the areas hardest hit were south of U.S. 20, west of Illinois 31, the City Center and the city's northeast side.

The storm's impact in Elgin was evident in many neighborhoods Friday. Orange Street, near its Jewett Street intersection, was closed off due to downed tree branches and power lines. **School District U-46 Superintendent Tony Sanders** shared a photo of the minor damage done when a lightning struck the Abbott Middle School chimney.

Traffic backups were reported at intersections where traffic signals were knocked out, including Walnut Avenue and State Street, Dundee Avenue and Summit Street and on South Grove Avenue near downtown.

Aaron Cosentino, the city's Neighborhood Services director, said the city joined forces with ComEd to set up two cooling buses at Elgin City Hall Friday for people who lost their power and air conditioning because of the storm.

Elgin fire and police received about 300 calls within a two-hour timeframe Thursday night, most of them for storm issues, Cagann said. Elgin's 311 service received more than 100 requests for forestry service.

"I think this storm had a greater impact than (the heavy rainfall storms in May)" in terms of calls for service, Cagann said. "We've had a few microburst events. For a microburst event, this is a fairly standard aftermath."



A tree on the 1100 block of Cedar Avenue in Elgin was damaged Thursday night in a microburst that moved through the city shortly after 7 p.m.

"In my personal experience, when we typically see this type of call volume (it's because there was) a microburst," he said.

Cosentino said they received 207 forestry calls Thursday and Friday, nearly as many as the roughly 240 forestry calls they had received in the first six months of 2020.

"This microburst is the most significant weather event this year by far," he said.

City crews were mobilized to respond to calls shortly after 7 p.m. Thursday, and were assisted by Hanover Township, Kane County Emergency Management teams and a forestry contractor service hired by the city.

Cagann said the cleanup process can take time and urged residents to be patient. He also advised that downed tree limbs should only be removed if there are no downed power lines nearby.

“Even if you think they’re dead, they’re not,” he said.



Bob Wilson carries broken branches to the street Friday after a tree limb fell during Thursday night's storm, damaging the picket fence in front of his family's home in the 600 block of Douglas Avenue in Elgin.

South Elgin and Countryside Fire District Chief Steve Wascher said they received 22 calls Thursday night, most of them for downed power lines or tree branches.

“There’s some pretty good size branches that were knocked down by the wind,” Wascher said.

The National Weather Service reported rainfall to be just under an inch in the Elgin area. Ogorek said the Fox River was not in any flood advisory, watch or warning at this time. The weekend forecast calls for cooler daytime temperatures in the 80s, he said. There is a chance for some rain and storms Saturday night into Sunday morning.

Property owners want stretch of Elgin’s Shales Parkway closed to truck traffic

By: Gloria Casas



Residents on or near Shales Parkway in Elgin say they are concerned about the heavy truck traffic on the roadway and want the city to address the issue.

Property owners want the city of Elgin to turn a portion of Shales Parkway, between East Chicago Street and U.S. 20, into a local-traffic-only roadway to cut down on excessive truck traffic.

“The heavy truck traffic is noisy,” said Robert Sumoski, who’s owned property on East Chicago Street for 27 years. “It’s dirty, from their cargo and emission, it’s dangerous to the local people and it’s detrimental to the roadway.”

People who live and work in the area don't want to hinder businesses along Shales Parkway, but want restrictions to limit the road to just local traffic and local deliveries, Sumoski said. "We hope that with this restriction, it's a start."

"I've seen the traffic along Shales Parkway and East Chicago Street transition from a quiet, slow-paced, mostly automobile traffic to something that resembles a busy highway," he said.

The increased usage is the result of several construction projects on U.S. 20 over the last seven years, Sumoski said. "The construction work that lasted for many months at a time resulted in slower than normal traffic times," he said.

Commercial truck traffic from the industrial business on Bluff City Boulevard found it's easier to get around the congestion on U.S. 20 by taking Shales Parkway, Sumoski said. While the construction projects are done, there's still a high volume of truck traffic on the road, he said.

Sumoski and his neighbors have done random counts of the gravel, scrap steel and garbage trucks and estimate 1,000 trucks use the roadway daily, he said. What also concerns neighbors is the number of trucks carrying hazardous materials, he said.

Truck traffic is mixed in with passenger vehicles, some driven by **Elgin High School students**, and **School District U-46** school buses that operate from a facility on Shales Parkway, Sumoski said.

Getting the road designation changed is more complicated than it would initially appear, said Elgin police Lt. Steve Bianchi, head of the department's traffic unit.

His research has found that Shales Parkway was designated an Illinois Department of Transportation Class II truck route despite it being a local street, he said. The city's ordinance lists it as a Class II truck route as well, he said.

A Class II designation sets a limit for truck lengths and establishes a maximum weight of up to 34,000 pounds, according to IDOT regulations.

Bianchi is doing research to determine if the road can be designated local traffic only and what that would mean, he said. The traffic unit will speak with IDOT, the city's engineers, council members and other officials about the possibility of changing the designation, he said.

While Bianchi continues doing research, he has officers patrolling the stretch of road to watch for speeding and to deal with debris that flies from trucks, he said. The speed limit is 30 mph.

"We're going to address some of the speeding. That's something we can work on without any issue," Bianchi said. "We're going to help citizens as much as we can," adding it's a quality of life issue for the residents in the area.

---Daily Herald---07/10/2020

Federal aid a small piece of school revenue

Trump has threatened to withhold it from districts that don't resume in-person classes

By: Elena Ferrarin

Federal funding, which President Donald Trump threatened to take away from schools that don't reopen in the fall, represents an average 7% of revenue for the 852 public school districts in Illinois.

Nearly 27% came from state funding and nearly 66% from local funding in fiscal year 2018, the latest data available from the Illinois State Board of Education, said spokeswoman Jackie Matthews.

The federal funding comes in the form of different grant programs, such as for low-income students, special education, nutrition, after-school programs and parent activities tied to children's education. There is also funding specifically for rural school districts and for districts with students or parents who are migrant workers.

As for Trump's comments Wednesday to pull funding if schools don't bring students back, "I think schools are primarily focused on developing their reopening plans and coming up with plans that keep students, teachers and families safe, and maximize their instruction," Matthews said.

Chicago Public Schools, the largest school district in the state, got the most federal grant money at \$448.1 million in fiscal year 2019-20, and Elgin Area School District U-46, the state's second-largest, received \$31.6 million, according to ISBE's information.

U-46 Superintendent Tony Sanders said federal funding accounted for about 6% of the district's \$594 million budget for the 2019-20 school year. He said the total figure was more than \$34 million through May 31, of which \$8 million funded Title 1 programs for low-income students, \$7.9 million went to the National School Lunch Program, and \$6.2 million was allocated for special education.

Trump's comments will not affect plans in U-46 because "the president does not have the authority to withhold those funds," Sanders said.

"We are opening either way," he said. "It can't stop ... what we are planning for next school year."

Sanders said the district still must abide by guidance provided by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as well as state and local health departments.

"If (Trump's) requirement is to have every kid, every day in person, then that would be advice I would have to go against based on the CDC regulations, state health department, local health department, all of whom say that we must really work to provide that 6 feet of space, and also wearing of face masks and all the protections," Sanders said.

In the suburbs, others that got large sums include East Aurora School District 131, which got \$13 million, Palatine School District 15, which got \$5.9 million, and Round Lake School District 116, which got \$4.5 million, according to the ISBE.

Rondout School District 72, a K-8 school district in Lake County, got the least in the state — \$1,187.

Libertyville-Vernon Hills Area High School District 128 received nearly \$221,000 in federal funds last year, according to ISBE. The full figure is about \$600,000 including Medicaid reimbursement, mostly for special education, said Dan Stanley, the district's assistant superintendent of business.

"With federal funding representing less than 1% of District 128, I do not foresee the loss of funding affecting our reopening plans. Even if special education funding is cut, it does not remove the requirement for the district to provide those services," Stanley said.

Township High School District 214, headquartered in Arlington Heights, will follow the guidance of state and local authorities and will be releasing its reopening plans later this month, district spokesman Dave Beery said. The district got nearly \$1.7 million in federal grant funding last year, according to ISBE's data.

“While the White House comments add one new dimension, school districts already have been working with a landscape that shifts in one way or another almost daily. This is one more element that we will work with in crafting our reopening guidelines,” Beery said.

ISBE encourages in-person instruction, because that’s the best way that students can learn, but the guidance of science and data regarding the COVID-19 spread is crucial, Matthews said.

“We are working very closely with the Illinois Department of Public Health, which has a team of epidemiologists, infection preventionists and medical experts who are providing information on the guidance.”

U-46 considers hybrid model for reopening schools

By: Madhu Krishnamurthy



“If we come out of this with schools looking the same, then we’ve failed,” Elgin Unit District U-46 Superintendent Tony Sanders said of reopening schools this fall using a hybrid instructional model of in-person classes and remote learning.

Elgin Area School District U-46 students could return to classrooms this fall in a combination of in-person instruction and remote learning.

Officials are considering a hybrid instructional model for reopening schools after more than 3,000 employees and 13,000 families provided feedback in a survey conducted last week.

Results show staff members and families are seeking certain assurances for reopening schools, including strict 6-foot social distancing and limiting group sizes, the use of face coverings at all times even when social distancing is maintained, and clear protocols for communicating cases of COVID-19.

Responses were divided among people seeking to return to daily in-person instruction, those wanting a hybrid or blended learning approach, or others seeking full-time distance learning, Superintendent Tony Sanders said.

Nearly 30% of parents said they would prefer to start the school year in full-time distance learning, while 12% said they would not allow their student to return for any in-person instruction. A majority of people said they are ready for students to return for in-person instruction with appropriate safeguards aligned to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines.

The hybrid approach — requiring students to attend in-person classes on some days and work remotely on others — gained greatest acceptance among employees and parents. Officials are considering a slow rollout during the first few weeks of school with smaller groups of students.

“We have a lot of work to do between now and Aug. 12,” Sanders said. “We know school is going to look different no matter what we do. We have to learn a new social contract through all of this. All students, pre-K through 12th grade, have to recognize the importance of wearing a mask not to protect yourself but to protect others, the importance of washing your hands frequently, the 6 feet of distance, getting used to what that looks like.”

Within the hybrid model, employees and parents said they would prefer having students attend alternating days each week. Most students would attend two days a week in person, though certain groups might need to be at school more frequently. Most schools would run at 50% capacity daily.

“We will be following up with families and staff to determine with more specificity which students plan to return under our hybrid instructional model and which students plan to only return for full-time distance learning,” Sanders said.

“Our instruction in both the hybrid model and distance learning will be different from the distance learning students experienced from March 13 through the end of the 2019-20 school year, and will more closely align with in-person expectations.”

Unlike distance learning in the spring, students will be held accountable for learning regardless of instructional setting.

“There will be coursework. There will be assignments. There will be grades issued. There will be assessments given,” Sanders said. “Ongoing engagement will be expected and closely monitored.”

Teachers also will receive training on using the new learning management system so they can better engage with students on one consistent platform.

“People need to be hopefully flexible and agile as things will change between now and August,” Sanders said.

“If we come out of this with schools looking the same, then we’ve failed.”

---The Courier-News---07/10/2020

Families push for remote learning

Survey: Over 35% of parents, staff want mix of in-person, e-learning

By: Rafael Guerrero

More than a third of families and employees who responded to a **District U-46** survey said they want a mix of in-person classes and e-learning when school resumes in the fall while another third said they prefer remote learning only.

The districtwide survey was completed by more than 13,000 parents and 3,000 staff members as the district considers who to do given the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, according to results released Wednesday.

Respondents were asked what safety safeguards they saw as most important when schools reopen, which methods of instruction they preferred, and what they thought specifically about in-person and hybrid instruction.

Numbers show 36% of responding staff and 38% of parents prefer a mix of in-person classes and remote learning. About 900 parents completed the Spanish-language version of the survey, with 36% supporting a hybrid of both types of teaching approaches.

However, another 29% of staff and 29% of parents said they want all instruction to be done remotely, at least for the start of the new year. Of the Spanish survey-takers, the number was 43%.

Twelve percent of all parents said they would not allow their children to return to school if in-person classes was the only option.

In a letter he posted with the survey results, Superintendent Tony Sanders said his preference would be the hybrid model in which students attended in-person classes on a set number of days and do remote learning on the others.

“I think we can all agree that our desire is to eventually return to in-person instruction on a daily basis, safely,” he said. “However, there is no way to ensure student and staff safety and have in-person instruction every day for all students. At least not at the start of the school year.”

About 35% of both staff and parents said they preferred students to attend in person on alternating days rather than consecutive, the numbers showed.

Spanish survey-takers were split, with about 29% preferring alternate days and 29% preferring consecutive days. Another 28% rejected both options as well as a model in which students would attend in-person classes one week and do remote learning the next.

Sanders said in his letter that subcommittees have been formed with the district’s employee unions to come up with a hybrid instruction plan, which must take into consideration such things as bus schedules, lunch schedules, social distancing and other safety factors.

If the hybrid model is adopted, students will be assessed and issued grades aligned with current standards, regardless if the student is in school or at home, Sanders said. Student work and online engagement will factor into grades as well, he said.

“We will be following up with families and staff to determine with more specificity which students plan to return under our hybrid instructional model and which students plan to only return for full-time distance learning,” he said.

When asked in the survey to rank what they valued most for classroom safety, the overwhelming majority of parents — 4,296 — said smaller class sizes and social distancing of 6 feet. Another 2,907 cited mandatory mask usage.

District staff, however, were split on their top two concerns. Results showed 1,048 employees listed face coverings as their top priority while another 1,041 cited social distancing. Other options listed were frequent cleaning and sanitizing, frequent hand washing, clear protocols for addressing COVID-19 cases, and reduced sharing of objects.

Other survey results indicated:

5% of staff are not likely to return to any in-person instruction/work at schools this fall.

79% of staff are likely to return under any conditions or under strict social distancing measures.

40% of parents will allow their children to return to school under any safeguards in place.

18% of families who responded in Spanish said they would allow their children to return to school under any conditions and another 43% said they would let their children return if strict social distancing is in place.

Members of the Elgin Teachers Association made up a majority of the staff responding to the survey, at about 62%, followed by members of the district's educational assistants and building secretaries unions.

More information on the school's reopening plans will be discussed at the July 20 school board meeting.

"Let me emphasize that we will all need to be agile and patient," Sanders said in his letter.

"Even my above guidance to the teams planning for the school year may change. We receive updated guidance from state and local authorities on a regular basis, and we all are aware of spikes in COVID-19 cases as some states have reopened. Any number of things may cause us to shift directions."