

## Press Clippings 09/05/20 to 09-09-20

---The Courier-News --- 09/09/2020

School District U-46

### **State: Only 15% of kindergartners ready**

**Early childhood education advocates in area have made concerted effort to improve levels**

**By: Rafael Guerrero**

Only 15% of School District U-46 kindergartners last fall were considered ready for kindergarten in all three areas examined, down from 16% last year, state data shows.

Every fall kindergarten students in Illinois are observed and assessed by their teachers for the Illinois State Board of Education's Kindergarten Individual Development Survey. The three evaluation categories are math, language/literacy and social/emotional development.

While U-46 students went down cumulatively after making a significant six-point jump from 2017 to 2018, there were a couple of small positive improvements, said Peggy Ondera, the district's early learning director.

About 15% of Black kindergartners were considered ready in all three areas in 2019, up from 11% in 2018, she said. And 24% were proficient in math, up from 23% in 2018.

However, about half of students weren't proficient in any of the three categories, Ondera said.

"When I see that 50% are not ready in any developmental area, that it stayed flat, certainly that is a cause for concern for me," she said.

The numbers are particularly striking when compared with the statewide average, which shows 29% of kindergarten children being ready in all three categories, up from 26% in 2018, data showed.

Among the things teachers evaluate are how a student performs specific tasks, including social interaction with peers and adults, playtime, letters and words, communication skills, and recognizing numbers and shapes.

Early childhood education advocates in the Elgin area have made a concerted effort to improve readiness levels by reaching out to parents to offer help and boosting children's access to books by leaving them in unorthodox places, like laundromats and medical offices.

This year, with students starting the school year with remote learning because of the coronavirus pandemic, there's concern those trying to make a difference won't be able to make contact with families, advocates said.

"The last thing we want is for children to be at home and not be engaged in education as they should be," Alignment Collaborative for Education Executive Director Nancy Coleman said.

The alignment collaborative's mission includes early education improvement.

"We've got to move that needle — 15% is not acceptable," Coleman said.

"It is not a question of U-46's preparation. It's more a question of how are we going to do a better job as a community promoting early education and having a strategic plan moving that number up," she said.

This summer, U-46 joined forces with local nonprofits like Elgin Partnership for Early Learning and Alignment Collaborative for Education to expand the summer reading initiative, "Learning

On The Go,” into four neighborhoods in Elgin and Streamwood, partnership Executive Director Amber Peters said in an email interview.

Families picked up lunch and early learning bags as part of a free giveaway, Peters said.

The neighborhood effort had to be more “grab and go” because of the pandemic and social distancing, she said. COVID-19 also affected other established efforts, like its “Language in the Laundromat” or “While you Wait” projects.

“Once it is safe, we will be checking those sites to replace some books,” Peters said.

The pandemic forced local early education partners to think of new ways to reach families, Ondera said. The Elgin Partnership for Early Learning, for example, received funding for “diaper pop ups” through which families received diapers along with learning materials, she said.

The Gail Borden Public Library’s Bookmobile and the Elgin Census committee collaborated with these efforts, the latter providing books at the same time they were trying to get people counted.

A ribbon-cutting for the renovated Festival Park is scheduled for later this month and organizers plan to be there to unveil new English-and-Spanish signage intended for children to read and learn from while there, Ondera said.

“Making families and parents aware of early childhood education and the impact it can have, it builds relationships. It shows we are there,” she said of merging census, food distribution and other initiatives with early learning outreach.

It’s important to keep looking for ways to make inroads, Peters said.

If children are coming to school unprepared for basic beginner learning, “we have to look at the barriers and gaps in needed resources to offer opportunities and support to the families of our earliest learners in the community,” she said.

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**---Press Clippings---09/08/2020**  
**There are no U-46 related news stories.**

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**---Press Clippings---09/07/2020**  
**There are no U-46 related news stories.**

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**---Press Clippings---09/06/2020**  
**There are no U-46 related news stories.**

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