

Press Clippings 03-27-21 to 03-29-21

---Daily Herald---03/29/2021

The pandemic's impact on learning

U-46 superintendent: 'It is going to take multiple years to ensure that this generation does not miss out'

By: Madhu Krishnamurthy

It's been a stressful year for students switching between remote and in-person learning while dealing with pandemic restrictions and social isolation from peers.

And it's taking a toll on their performance.

In Elgin Area School District U-46, teachers say Latino students are struggling to keep up with their peers, while two high schools in St. Charles Unit District 303 saw more first-semester failing grades compared to recent years.

Similar scenarios are playing out in schools across the suburbs and nationwide.

Educators don't yet have a complete picture of how much learning loss students have experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Illinois State Board of Education is studying how student learning has changed since schools first suspended in-person instruction last March, and how threat of illness, job loss and trauma experienced by students and their families have exacerbated the situation.

Meanwhile, suburban school leaders are trying to assess just how many students are struggling and find creative ways of addressing learning gaps through expanded summer school options and other interventions.

In U-46, more than 9,000 seventh- through 12th-graders had at least one incomplete grade in their coursework in October. That number reduced by about 40% to 5,616 by mid-January, which was still higher than the 3,162 students who had one incomplete grade in January of 2020. That amounts to 15% of the more than 37,000 students enrolled at the state's second-largest school district.

Such course failures are mirrored across suburban districts.

"It is going to take multiple years of effort to ensure that this generation does not miss out," U-46 Superintendent Tony Sanders said. "Kids are very resilient. Even if they have not met all the academic standards, they certainly are learning a lot of lessons in this time."

U-46 is seeking help from community nonprofits, park districts, police departments, and libraries to provide summer enrichment programs for students. It will use federal COVID-19 aid — roughly \$27 million over two summers earmarked for learning loss — to help pay for any such programs offered by community partners, Sanders said.

"We are still going to offer summer school, as well, for elementary, middle and high school," Sanders said. "We just want to make sure we will have plenty of opportunities for all kids to participate in some way. We want to make it also very engaging, hands-on so we are going to use a project-based learning approach."

School leaders say a lot depends on how many teachers, who already are burned out, are willing to teach summer school.

In District 303, first-semester failing grades at St. Charles East nearly doubled from 394 last year to 774, while St. Charles North saw an increase from 211 to 306, as of Jan. 6. The numbers were much higher in the fall — more than 3,200 combined failing grades in November. Low-income students and some other groups are showing wider gaps, said Denise Herrmann, chief academic officer for District 303.

Still, Herrmann added, there also have been some learning gains.

“There are definitely areas where students are growing and learning skills that they normally don’t get to practice during face-to-face instruction in the classroom,” she said. “Many of the students have really grown in their time-management skills ... are really increasing and becoming more sophisticated in their technology skills.”

Teachers have been monitoring student progress in reading and math monthly since August through new software allowing them to provide differentiated instruction. That wasn’t available before this school year.

“It’s very intentional,” Herrmann said. “The pandemic has accelerated our use of some of the online reading and math support tools.”

Officials now are trying to address academic performance gaps with extra help during the school day, after-school help, night-school possibilities and free online and in-person summer school for credit recovery.

In some cases, the youngest learners are seeing the greatest slippage in language and social skills, which can be critical in those formative years.

“Students who were struggling pre-pandemic are continuing to struggle,” said Brad Newkirk, chief academic officer for Batavia Public Schools. “They’re not closing any of those gaps ... and in many cases those are exacerbated.”

Newkirk said schools also are likely to see a disproportionate impact on students of color and students with disabilities.

“We’re going to have to increase the intensity of the interventions that we give students and then look for ways to engage them,” Newkirk said. “Especially when we talk about our youngest learners, we’re very concerned about the lack of socialization.”

Some districts are debating whether summer school programs should be held in-person or remotely due to vaccines being unavailable for children at this time.

Among them is Woodland District 50 in Gurnee. Unlike previous years, the district’s summer school will be expanded from the typical 100 to 150 participants to address the needs of struggling students. Officials still are assessing how many of the district’s 5,200 students in preschool through eighth grade need help.

“Not all those struggling students do want to come back in person ... so that adds another complexity,” said Steven Thomas, District 50 associate superintendent of teaching and learning with equity.

Quantifying what learning loss looks like has been tough because student performance isn't exactly comparable to previous years. But what is clear is social and emotional learning will be a key aspect of summer programs this year, educators say.

In Palatine-Schaumburg Township High School District 211, which educates roughly 12,000 students, officials are trying to mitigate some of the pandemic's impact by teachers providing afternoon academic support to struggling students this semester.

"Our counselors and student services teams are also available during that time to connect for social-emotional health with students," said Josh Schumacher, District 211 assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction.

Similar to last summer, the district will pair each student who receives an incomplete grade with a teacher for tutoring help and invite all struggling students to participate in additional programs this summer.

Algonquin-based Community Unit District 300 will be offering two-week virtual and hybrid summer enrichment camps for elementary through high school grades, targeting students showing significant learning loss in testing.

Remedial help won't be limited to the summer, Superintendent Fred Heid said.

This fall, teachers will provide specific interventions and supports based on students' needs in elementary grades, and middle and high school students will have directed tutorials during study hall periods.

---The Courier-News---03/28/2021

Police to expand juvenile program

Elgin hires gang intervention specialist to help develop robust outreach, prevention

By: Gloria Casas



Mallette

Elgin Police Department plans to work with a consultant to expand and evolve Operation Homefront, its a gang prevention program.

“I don’t like to say gang violence,” said consultant Chris Mallette, of CKone, who’s the former director of the Chicago Violence Reduction Strategy. “I like to say group violence because when you say gangs, you put a face on it and that face is often construed to be a Black or brown face.”

Operation Homefront will be a violence intervention program, he said.

“Everybody agrees on preventing violence and getting positive outcomes for young people,” Mallette said, whose work has been featured on “60 Minutes” and in an A&E documentary on juvenile female gang members.

CKone’s goal is to “come along with the city of Elgin. It’s not to supplant. It’s not to displace or replace,” he said.

Mallette and his business partner, Charles Perry, are familiar with city because they led community conversations about race in Elgin a year and a half ago.

They want to share their knowledge as a means of encouraging the police in things they can be doing to improve situations, he said.

The plan has won the support of the Elgin City Council, which approved a \$90,000 contract with CKone this past week to help orchestrate program changes.

Operation Homefront started in 2009 with officers meeting parents to discuss gang-related activity in which their child might be involved.

Over the past 12 years, Elgin police have made more than 400 home visits, police Chief Ana Lalley said.

The police started looking at Operation Homefront last fall with the idea of developing a more robust response to juvenile outreach, preventions and intervention, she said.

“We’ve had a lot of success, and the officers in the Elgin Police Department have worked very hard to create that program,” Lalley said.

“We also understand through conversations with our community hearing community members who had concerns. We will always listen and not just listen but hear what’s being said.”

Among the things that will change is Operation Homefront’s name, she said. The violence intervention program will be focused on decreasing juvenile violence, juvenile arrests and gang involvement, and reducing high school dropout rates, she

said. It will have a multidisciplinary approach with partnerships between the police, School District U-46, community-based organizations, residents and faith-based groups, she said.

A customized approach will be taken, with referrals made by school resource officers, police investigators or community members, she said.

How the situation is approached will be discussed in advance.

“It’ll be determined whether police even need to be involved,” Lalley said. “The hope is we reduce our contact with juveniles and reduce violence. Our hope is you see those results in the future.”

Collaboration is key, Mallette said, as is following up to if there's been a positive change or if more help is necessary.

CKone will provide the framework for the program and training. An academic partner will also be chosen to help evaluate the program.

"We're all committed to this program. We're excited for it," Lalley said. "We think it's something the Elgin community has been asking for."

Training will be held beginning next month and continue into May.

The program is expected to be in place by June.

---Press Clippings---03/27/2021
There are no U-46 related news stories.
