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Grant to help Elgin-area residents affected by pandemic

By: Rick West



Community health care worker Luz Purcell offers assistance with getting a COVID-19 vaccine appointment for a couple at the Gail Borden Public Library Wednesday. The library district and its foundation received a state grant to help area residents affected by COVID-19 as part of the Pandemic Health Navigator Program. *Rick West | Staff Photographer*

A \$400,000 grant will help connect Elgin-area residents affected by COVID-19 with health and financial resources.

The Illinois Public Health Association grant funds the hiring of six community health care workers to help with people vaccine sign up and COVID-19 education, as well as referring those affected by the pandemic to resources for rental, food and utility assistance and more.

The Gail Borden Public Library District, its foundation and Centro de Informacion will coordinate with local, regional and state partners to assist in communities served by the library and Elgin Area School District U-46 as part of the Pandemic Health Navigator Program. The statewide program started in January with a goal of integrating community health centers, community-based organizations, and public health partners to coordinate resources for the most vulnerable populations affected by the pandemic.

Perry Maier, regional coordinator of the grant, worked with the library district during the 2020 census and will do so again in this effort. "We want this grant to help many, many people who need assistance," Maier said. "I was part of the original Census 2020 effort in Elgin and I experienced the power of dedicated people working together. We need those trusted messengers to help now."

Denise Raleigh, the library's division chief, public relations and development, said the library district has hired five of the six health care workers and reached out to the community network established during the census.

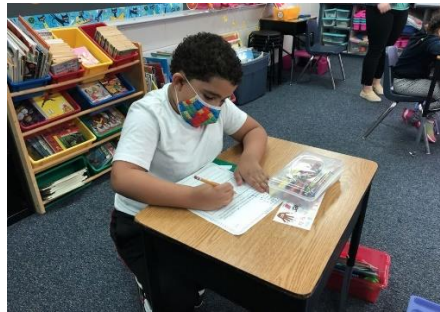
Raleigh said the navigator program will involve community outreach and helping people referred by IPHA. Workers will be posted at the library's main branch from 1 to 5 p.m. weekdays to offer assistance.

The IPHA grant, which is funded by the Illinois Department of Public Health, will largely be used for referral help but some money will be available to help with needs that community services may not be able to meet, she said.

"We are a great connecting space, so we'll use all of our connectivity and networks to make sure that people know we're doing this in the community," Raleigh said, "and just try to elevate people who have had an impact from COVID."

U-46 rolls out new summer school programs

By: Madhu Krishnamurthy



Elgin Area School District U-46 will offer expanded summer school options for students in elementary, middle and high schools to help make up for pandemic learning loss. *Courtesy of Elgin Area School District U-46*

In an effort to make up for pandemic learning loss, Elgin Area School District U-46 is providing a variety of summer enrichment programs this year offering students extended academic, physical fitness, outdoor, artistic, and other experiences.

Typically, summer school is about credit recovery and making up for failing grades. But the district's response this year is heightened because many students struggled with distance learning and social isolation for much of the school year.

For the first time, the district invited community organizations to submit proposals for in-person summer programs that would provide fun, innovative enrichment and recreational activities for elementary students. Also new this summer are programs to help incoming seventh- through 12th-graders prepare for the school year ahead.

On Monday, the U-46 board awarded more than \$1.1 million to eight community organizations to provide half- or full-day programs that meet the criteria. All programs are free to district families, and costs will be covered through federal COVID relief funds. Programs will be offered through local park districts, arts, and childcare and children's organizations, officials said.

(Summer programming) looks very different from what we have been offering in years past," said Suzanne Johnson, deputy superintendent of instruction.

Groups providing summer services include Three Fires Council (\$378,000), Golden Corridor YMCA (\$233,100), the Boys & Girls Club of Elgin (\$214,200), the city of Elgin (\$147,735), and the Streamwood Park District (\$53,550).

Programs for elementary students include: environmental education and connecting youth with nature; exploring STEM, STEAM, visual and performing arts, and leadership curriculum; building self-esteem and self-efficacy; and promoting cross-cultural experiences and active living.

Students with special needs will have extended learning through traditional summer school offered each year. Elementary students who need additional academic support can join in-person summer classes focused on reading and math.

Middle and high school students can access credit-recovery classes and can participate in three new voluntary camps to help prepare for the year ahead. Registration for those programs is open through May 6.

"We anticipate that we'll be able to serve at least 2,000 more students this year through our expanded summer programming," spokeswoman Mary Fergus said, adding that the district has the capacity to serve up to 11,000 additional students in its middle and high school camps.

The "Middle School Experience" and "Freshman Connection" are voluntary four-day programs for all incoming seventh- through ninth-graders hosted at each of the district's eight middle schools and five high schools, respectively.

Both programs will incorporate community and team-building activities aligned to social-emotional learning standards and help students get familiarized with their teachers, peers, schools and class schedules. Students will participate in activities promoting critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and communication.

"College Jumpstart" is a three-day voluntary program for incoming seniors. It will help students develop a college and career plan, explore study options, and prep for the application process.

For more information, visit u-46.org/summerschool.