

## Press Clippings 12/03/2021

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### **Tough results amid pandemic? Find out how your schools are doing on state report card**

By Madhu Krishnamurthy

Amid a challenging pandemic year, suburban schools struggled to help students meet proficiency standards and saw declines in student enrollment, state figures have shown. On Thursday, officials released annual assessment data showing just how severe the issues were in individual school districts.

The [2021 Illinois Report Card](#) provides school- and district-level results from the 2020-21 school year, offering communities more insight into the impact of remote learning last year and indicating what supports students need to recover.

To search for your school's results, visit [illinoisreportcard.com](http://illinoisreportcard.com). (U-46 schools listed here).

Preliminary spring testing data released in October from most schools statewide shows steep declines in students attaining proficiency in math and English language arts across grade levels -- 17.8% and 16.6%, respectively.

Among English learners, the decline in meeting standards was stark: 51.5% in English language arts and 54% in math.

Similarly, low-income students saw a 31% drop in English and a 38.7% dip in math, while special needs students saw declines of 30.4% in English and 23.5% in math.

Yet, some districts bucked the trend and were able to leverage federal pandemic relief funding and evidence-based teaching practices to achieve improvements in learning metrics, officials said.

Among those districts is DuPage High School District 88, which saw a 13% increase in students meeting or exceeding standards in reading on the SAT college entrance exam.

From the start of the school year, the district prioritized in-person instruction for high-need students, including English Learners and students with disabilities. It also provided in-person and online tutoring, investing in technology for remote instruction, and it conducted home visits and concentrated on social-emotional supports.

Northbrook District 28 saw a 14.1% increase in third-graders meeting or exceeding standards on the Illinois Assessment of Readiness math test. Districtwide math proficiency increased 6.4%.

Nearly 80% of students learned in person while 20% attended a Remote Learning Academy during the 2020-21 school year. The district hired 14 additional teachers for one year and expanded its instructional technology initiatives to provide both learning programs.

"We are confident that the full return to safe, in-person learning and the significant state and federal investment in our schools will provide the conditions for all our students to thrive in the coming years," State Superintendent of Education Carmen Ayala said. "Every school district has had a unique experience during the pandemic, with different strengths and challenges."

State education officials are encouraging school districts to use the [P-20 Council's Learning Renewal Resource Guide](#), combined with the local student data, to develop evidence-based strategies to support students' recovery from the pandemic.

Illinois schools have received more than \$7 billion in federal pandemic relief funding to fund interventions, such as after-school programming, community partnerships, summer school, tutoring and supports for students affected by trauma.

To date, 534 out of 939 school districts and other local education agencies have submitted applications for the third round of funding.

Statewide, school districts had the option to give last school year's federally required assessments either during an extended window in the spring or in the fall of this year due to pandemic disruptions.

The data released Thursday reflects 90% of school districts that opted to test in the spring. That includes results from the Illinois Assessment of Readiness and the SAT college entrance exam, which test students' mastery of grade-level standards in math and English language arts in third through eighth grades and 11th grade, respectively.

Results from districts that opted to test in the fall will be available next April, along with final state-level data.

But the final results won't include any growth data, because Illinois students were exempted from having to take state tests in the 2019-20 school year, nor will the performance results change summative designations for schools.

View school- and district-level assessment data with interactive graphics at [isbe.net/reportcard](https://isbe.net/reportcard).

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## **Elgin Public Museum gearing up for holidays with new director**

**By Rick West**



The Elgin Public Museum has promoted education coordinator Sharry Lynn Blazier to also be the museum's director. The museum is gearing up for the holidays with their annual "Touching on Traditions" exhibit and a Winter Solstice program. *Rick West | Staff Photographer*

The Elgin Public Museum will celebrate the holidays with a familiar exhibit and a familiar name as its new director.

The familiar exhibit is "Touching on Traditions," which opens Saturday and runs through the end of the month.

The familiar name is Sharry Lynn Blazier, who was recently tapped to be the new director of the 101-year-old museum. She's currently the museum's education coordinator and will do both jobs.

A lifelong Elginite, Blazier said she remembers spending many evenings with her dad at Lords Park.

"The museum was never open in the evenings," she said. "But he would always say, 'We'll go in there one day.' I never got here with my father."

The museum has been without a director for almost two years and lost its curator over the summer.

"If you don't have a director, it's hard to do things like get grants and make sure people believe you're stable enough to be worthy of a donation," Blazier said. "The title is important. So I said, please give me this title so I can try and make some things happen here."

Blazier said the board plans to begin looking for a curator next year.

Longtime volunteer and former museum coordinator Mike McGrath said the board made the right choice in hiring Blazier.

"She is such a hard worker and does so much for this museum," McGrath said. "She's very involved in so many things and has a great ability to engage with the community, which is so important for a small museum."

Touching on Traditions, which was canceled last year because of the pandemic, is a long-running annual collection of multicultural holiday artifacts from around the world. The exhibit features Christmas displays, including trees decorated in styles from different countries. There are also displays showing other cultural celebrations like Kwanzaa, Hanukkah, Diwali, Loi Krathong and Ramadan.

Unable to make changes this year, Blazier said she plans to evolve the exhibit starting next year.

"This used to be a community event where people would come in and decorate trees according to their heritage or bring things from their culture," she said. "It was a communal effort, a community effort that people fell away from gradually. I want to bring that back next year."

The museum will also hold a Winter Solstice celebration on Dec. 19. People can learn how ancient cultures celebrated the Winter Solstice and enjoy a solstice stroll and music from the **Elgin High School Madrigals**.

Blazier said she envisions community involvement being an "absolutely huge" part of the museum's future.

"A major priority is to get the community back here and truly involved with this museum," Blazier said, adding that she is seeking local businesses to sponsor new exhibits. "We really want to bring this place back to life."

That is ironic for a museum full of dead things, she admits.

"The trick is for us not to go extinct," she said.

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## **Larkin blows out South Elgin in UEC opener**

**By Craig Brueske**

Larkin's basketball team began its Upstate Eight Conference season Thursday night with a resounding 78-56 victory over South Elgin.

Senior forward Fernando Perez Jr. paced the Royals (5-1, 1-0) with a game-high 25 points on 8-of-12 shooting from the field, including a pair of 3-pointers.

Perez Jr. scored 11 of his points during the Royals' 23-8 second-quarter surge that snapped a 12-12 deadlock after one period.

"We let the game come to us and locked down defensively," said Perez Jr., who added 7 rebounds and a pair of assists.

Larkin scored the first 7 points of the second quarter on a pair of Perez Jr. midrange jumpers, capped by a corner 3-pointer from sophomore guard Jakob Blakley, who finished with 20 points, including six 3-pointers.

The Royals extended their lead to 27-14 midway through the period, as Perez Jr. highlighted the 15-2 run with 5 consecutive points, including a 3-pointer.

"When your coaches let you do what you know you can do, you feel more confident in your abilities," said Perez Jr.

Larkin led 35-20 at halftime, outscoring the Storm (1-4, 0-1) 15-0 from beyond the arc.

"That was a huge concentration for us in practice -- to try and limit their threes because they can shoot it," said Royals coach Deryn Carter. "I thought we did a heck of a job defensively.

"We knew they (the Storm) would come out with a lot of energy and emotion with this being our first conference game. We had to hold serve -- take that first punch and deliver one of our own. We kind of did just that."

Senior guard Damari Wheeler-Thomas, who became the school's all-time leading scorer during last week's Rockford Tip-Off Classic, added 14 points, 6 assists and 4 steals along with solid defense against South Elgin all-UEC senior guard Drew Cwik (4 points).

"Damari locking down Cwik was big because that's what opened up the game for us," said Perez Jr.

Senior forward Dontrell Maxie chipped in with 9 points and 8 rebounds, while Jamarion Stubbs added 4 points, 4 assists and 3 steals for the Royals.

"I'm proud of the effort," said Carter. "I'm proud of the guys in the first conference game -- we'll take it. We've got a long way to go, and we've got to get a lot better, but we'll take this for sure."

Senior guard Brian Vesta led the Storm with 23 points and 10 rebounds, while Jadin Ashby added 11 points.

"Brian has been playing phenomenal basketball," said Storm assistant coach Ryan Storm, who was filling in for head coach Brett Johnson.

"We had a couple opportunities there where if we come up with some (loose) balls, maybe we get it (Larkin's lead) down. They're a tough team, and they're going to win their share of games this season, but I'm happy with how our team fought tonight."