

## Press Clippings 7/28/2018

---Daily Herald--- 7/28/18

### **New Elgin charter school just about ready for kids**

BY MADHU KRISHNAMURTHY



The Elgin Math and Science Academy Charter School in Elgin is about ready to go after renovations of the former Fox River Country Day School campus on Dundee Avenue, such as to the flooring in the common area. *Courtesy of Melanie Gibb*

The new [Elgin Math and Science Academy Charter School](#) will be ready for business next week ahead of the start of classes on Aug. 15, officials said Friday.

Enrollment is at the maximum of 208 students in kindergarten through third grades for the school's inaugural year -- two classes each of 26 students per grade.

"There is a waiting list for every grade," said Kerin Kelly, an estate lawyer and president of the Elgin Charter School Initiative, whose board will manage the school. "Currently EMSA has 123 students on its waitlist. In total, more than 400 students applied for EMSA's 208 seats."

The group fought for and won state permission to open the Elgin charter school after previously being denied once by the Illinois State Charter School Commission and twice by the Elgin Area School District U-46 school board. In October, the state panel sanctioned the charter primarily to serve at-risk students in the area under state oversight.

School leaders plan to add grades each year through eighth grade. The state has capped enrollment at 400 by the fifth year.

The state pays 100 percent of tuition costs -- roughly \$10,300 per student -- plus categorical funding, such as special education and Title I funds for low-income students,

for a total budget of roughly \$2.1 million yearly. Operational costs are expected to be \$4.8 million at full enrollment.

Families must pay a \$145 registration fee, which could be waived for students qualifying for the federal free and reduced-lunch program, and a \$60 activity fee.

Roughly half the students enrolled are eligible for free and reduced lunch, Kelly said.

Students will be served breakfast and lunch provided by Chicago-based food service provider Gourmet Gorilla Inc.

Lezlie Fuhr, 45, a 22-year veteran educator, was hired earlier this year as the school's first principal. Since then, Fuhr has hired 10 teachers, eight teacher assistants, four administrators and a support staff member. School leaders also have hired a bilingual coordinator, a special education director, chief financial officer and instructional coach, Kelly said.

Teachers underwent five days of intensive Expeditionary Learning Education training earlier this month in Denver and Milwaukee. They start work Wednesday. All school employees will be trained starting Tuesday through Aug. 14 in the expeditionary learning model and curriculum development, Kelly said.

Costs of renovating the school site -- the former Fox River Country Day School campus on Dundee Avenue, leased from the city of Elgin -- have come in below the \$200,000 budgeted for repairs of the Neill building, which houses 13 classrooms.

"We have had many generous donations of time and materials," Kelly said. "Our construction manager has donated his time to the project."

Wintrust Bank, with whom the group has a line of credit, donated dozens of office chairs, and Vecchio Manufacturing of Elgin donated student whiteboards.

This fall, school leaders will develop a plan for the other buildings on campus. That includes getting a 2,100-square-foot art barn operational -- estimated to cost roughly \$200,000 to fix the windows, interior, roof and possibly add bathrooms.

"We think we can do it for less than \$200,000, but we are just starting to collect some bids on that," Kelly said. "We have raised \$28,000 toward the art barn improvements."

An open house and orientation for families will be from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. Aug. 14 at the school. Parents will get to meet teachers, tour the building and get other logistical information.

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## Day of Caring in Elgin

Volunteers serve around city as United Way event returns

BY MADHU KRISHNAMURTHY



Volunteers from the YWCA Teen Reach program paint colorful games on the blacktop playground of Ronald D. O'Neal Elementary School on Franklin Street in Elgin Friday morning as part of The United Way of Elgin's Day of Caring. *John Starks | Staff Photographer*

About 120 volunteers from various local businesses participated Friday in United Way of Elgin's 20th Day of Caring.

What used to be an annual event resumed after a five-year hiatus. This year featured beautification projects at nine Elgin-area health and human services agencies and activities at three Elgin Area School District U-46 elementary schools.

It kicked off with a morning rally at Larkin High School in Elgin that included coffee and doughnuts and brief remarks from United Way of Elgin board members, who also delivered boxed lunches to each project site.

"We set out to just kind of do a scaled-back version of the massive ones we used to do because we haven't done it in a while," said Elissa Kojzarek, United Way of Elgin director of marketing. "We had a lot of new volunteers this year ... (for) more than half this was their first Day of Caring event."

Volunteers provided services at the Association for Individual Development, Boys & Girls Club of Elgin, Easter Seals DuPage & Fox Valley Region, Ecker Center for Mental Health, Family Service Association, Food for Greater Elgin, Northern Illinois Food Bank, PADS of Elgin, Well Child Center, and Elgin's Highland, Ronald D. O'Neal and Harriet Gifford elementary schools.

They painted conference rooms and client areas, cleaned, did landscaping, site beautification, planting and weeding.

"We had one group at Gifford Elementary that was doing a mobile food pantry with the Northern Illinois Food Bank," Kojzarek said. "The volunteers really enjoyed their projects."

At Highland Elementary, volunteers from Chase Bank did gardening work, including planting new trees and creating a new bed featuring plants native to northern Illinois.

"Highland has a beautiful school campus with many mature trees," Principal Steve Johnson said. "We are excited for the United Way volunteers to assist in adding additional plants and trees so that current and future students can enjoy a pleasant place to learn."

Volunteers from the YWCA Teen Reach program painted games, including hopscotch, a number jungle, shoots and ladders, and a maze, on the blacktop where students play during recess at Ronald D. O'Neal Elementary.

"At O'Neal, we believe that when children have access to outside activities, they can develop socially and emotionally, as well as physically," Principal Marcie Marzullo said, adding the games allowed students "to engage in collaborative, cardiovascular, and curricular fun."

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### **U-46 looks at offering ROTC**

Why some suburban high schools say it's needed

BY MADHU KRISHNAMURTHY



**Waukegan High School's Army Reserve Officers' Training Corps cadets march in the city's Memorial Day parade. The school's ROTC program, which emphasizes leadership and good citizenship, is nearly 100 years old. Courtesy of Carter Bell**

A group of Elgin veterans say they support Elgin Area School District U-46 potentially offering training for military careers as a pathway for high schoolers.

U-46 administrators are evaluating expanding high school career academies, including the merits of offering a Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps program. Supporters say such training programs are an important part of civic education.

"The primary goal of the program is to motivate young people to be better citizens," said Craig Essick, commander of American Legion Post 57 in Elgin, an Army veteran and a retired Streamwood police officer. "We cannot think of a better goal for U-46 students as they pursue an education and learn the true meaning of citizenship and service to our communities."

A few suburban high schools -- Aurora, Bolingbrook, Waukegan and Wheeling -- offer Air Force, Army or Navy JROTC programs. The programs are overseen by branches of the military, which provide structured curriculum and certified instructors.

While some U-46 parents have said they fear such a program would lead to targeting minorities and low-income students who don't have other options for military recruitment, instructors at schools that already have programs say they are not a military recruitment tool but rather provide valuable life skills' training.

## Responsible citizens



**Wheeling High School Navy Junior ROTC cadets exhibit their rifle technique during a drill competition at the Great Lakes Naval Training Center in February. Northwest Suburban High School District 214 is among the few suburban school districts to offer ROTC -- something Elgin Area School District U-46 is considering starting.** - Courtesy of Jeff Morse

Wheeling High School houses a magnet Navy JROTC program for Northwest Suburban High School District 214's six high schools. The program started in 1969 and runs year-round.

Enrollment spiked to roughly 170 students in the 2005-06 school year but has tapered off to 123 students, said Jeff Morse, a retired Navy lieutenant commander and Desert Shield veteran who has been teaching JROTC for 24 years.

Morse said the program mainly builds students' confidence, organization and leadership skills. Only two out of 18 seniors who graduated from it in May have gone into the military.

For some students, such programs provide a sense of belonging and community just like other high school clubs.

"There are some kids who just may not be athletes, or science club doesn't spark them," Morse said. "But they get into ROTC and they find something they can be good at, and it just changes them. It's got something to offer to just about anyone with any background."

Students also learn about military organization, history, international law, current events, aerodynamics and physical sciences. The course is capped off by a leadership seminar the final year. Military-style drills in uniform, physical training and extracurricular activities -- including academic, marksmanship, cyber patriot and robotics teams -- are par for the course.



**Wheeling High School Navy Junior ROTC cadets exhibit their rifle technique during a drill competition at the Great Lakes Naval Training Center in February. Northwest Suburban High School District 214 is among the few suburban school districts to offer ROTC -- something Elgin Area School District U-46 is considering starting. - Courtesy of Jeff Morse**

Illinois has 14 Navy JROTC units with more than 3,000 cadets enrolled in Chicago and surrounding suburbs. Nationally, 61 percent of Navy JROTC graduates pursue postsecondary education and 47 percent say they intend to enter military service, said Cmdr. Frederick Martin, spokesman for the Naval Service Training Command based near North Chicago.

### **Instilling values**



**West Aurora High School's Air Force ROTC Lady Blackhawks Unarmed Exhibition Team won the 2018 national championships. West Aurora and Bolingbrook high schools are among only 14 schools statewide to have an Air Force ROTC program. - Courtesy of Erik Pettyjohn**

West Aurora High School's Air Force JROTC is among 17 statewide and one of two in the suburbs. The program, now in its fifth year, is growing with 180 cadets enrolled.

Community service, character building and discipline are core values of the program, said retired Air Force Lt. Col. Erik Pettyjohn, senior aerospace science instructor.

"We do have high expectations of behavior," Pettyjohn said. "It offers a lot of structure. We basically use Air Force customs and traditions to instill good character, honesty, integrity, service and excellence. ... A lot of times students won't get that type of instruction, mentorship in other areas."



**West Aurora High School's Air Force ROTC Drill Team won at nationals in May. West Aurora and Bolingbrook high schools are the only suburban districts and among only 14 schools statewide to have an Air Force ROTC program. - Courtesy of Erik Pettyjohn**

The curriculum primarily focuses on aerospace sciences and leadership education, as well as health and wellness. Some students get a taste of riding in an airplane for free offered by local flying clubs. Students also learn how to handle stress and adversity, applying for college and job interviews.

Pettyjohn said about 95 percent of cadets complete high school in four years and between 5 and 10 percent of graduates go into the military.

### **Providing service**



**Military balls are part of the tradition of Waukegan High School's Army Reserve Officers' Training Corps program, the primary goal of which is leadership training and teaching good citizenship. Elgin Area School District U-46 is considering starting an ROTC program at its high schools that is being met with resistance from some parents. - Courtesy of Carter Bell**

Originally, JROTC units were about military training to prepare candidates for the Army Reserves, said Carter Bell, a retired Army major and academic coordinator for Waukegan High School's Army JROTC program, which marks 100 years in 2019.

By the 1980s, the unpopularity of the Vietnam War and the anti-war movement had transformed it into a citizenship program, he said.

Waukegan has more than 600 students in its cadet corps -- the second-largest in the nation. Service learning projects and leadership development are big parts of the program.

"The purpose of a leader is to serve others," Bell said. "Last year, we contributed over 5,000 hours of community service to Waukegan. High school (Army) ROTC cadets contributed more than 7 million hours of community service to the nation."

Students help with park cleanups, serve as guides for 5K races, help with Lions Club pancake breakfasts and volunteer at parent-teacher conferences for middle and elementary schools.

"We are just trying to give kids options," Bell said. "It's just another way of getting kids to connect with school and to graduate ... 84 percent of our graduating cadets go to college."

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## **'We're official now'**

Elgin Math and Science Academy, city's first charter, nearly ready

BY RAFAEL GUERRERO



Workers are busy readying the Neil Building on what was the campus of the Fox River Country Day School to be used for the Elgin Math and Science Academy, the first charter school for District U46. (Mike Danahey/Courier-News )

Preparations are about "90 percent done" and the Elgin Math and Science Academy is nearly ready to open next month, said Kerry Kelly, the charter school's founding board president.

Painters and floor installers are putting the final touches on the school. The kitchen will be finished Tuesday. The kindergarten-through-third-grade school has a logo in place; uniforms and coffee mugs are available with the logo emblazoned on it.

"We're official now," administrative assistant Robert Ortiz said jokingly about the logo.

Elgin's first charter school registered its 200-plus students Thursday and Friday, less than three weeks before the start of EMSA's first school year.

Kelly and other school officials celebrated that the inaugural group is diverse and representative of several communities in the Elgin area.

According to a survey answered by 201 of the 208 students at EMSA, 37 percent identified as Hispanic/Latino. Another 20 percent identified as African-American. By comparison, Hispanic/Latino students made up slightly more than half of all U46 enrollment last school year, and African-American students made up about 6 percent.

About half the families submitted free- and reduced-lunch applications often used to determine low-income status, Kelly said.

Each grade level will have two classes of 26 students. There is a waiting list of 123 students among all grade levels.

Administrators hired 10 teachers and eight teaching assistants for the school year, Kelly said. Twenty-four faculty and staff have been hired, although EMSA is still hiring custodial staff and looking for a part-time nurse, she said.

Twenty-five percent of students speak another language besides English at home, according to bilingual coordinator Sarah Said. Eleven languages are spoken at EMSA family households, including English, Spanish and Korean.

EMSA will have monthly bilingual parent council meetings to engage the families in the new school, according to Said. She used “confianza” to describe her objective with bilingual parents — the word means “trust” in Spanish.

As part of the state charter school commission’s approval of the EMSA charter in 2017, all operations will be housed at the Neil Building, the largest building at the Fox River Country Day School site where EMSA is situated. Earlier inspections of the building indicated little work was needed to make Neil operational as a school.

Kelly said workers are finishing improvement projects at the school and will be ready by the first day of school. The kitchen will be finished in a matter of days.

New gutters will be installed, along with improvements to the landscaping and outdoor play areas. The largest project remaining is the painting of the building interior, she said.

Kelly said cosmetic work inside and outside the building have fallen below the school’s \$200,000 target.

The first day of school at EMSA will be Aug. 15, the same day as Elgin-area School District U46. School days are from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. The last day of school for EMSA students and families will be June 6, about two weeks after U46 ends its 2018-19 year. Kelly said EMSA students will get about 100 instructional hours more than their U46 counterparts.

The last 90 minutes each Friday will be used for field training sessions, in which local members of the arts and conservation communities will come in to work with the

students. The field training sessions fit EMSA's adoption of Expeditionary Learning, which promotes learning through outdoors education.

"We are giving these kids an advantage, tilting the field in their favor," Kelly said. "We hope they're going to be junior naturalists."

Courier-News reporter Mike Danahey contributed.

## **Press Clippings 7/30/2018**

**NOTE:** There were no U-46 related news stories in the July 30, 2018 newspapers.