

Press Clippings Through May 05, 2025

- Daily Herald -

Elgin Symphony to honor U-46's Jaimie Abney-Giraldo with Educator of the Year Award

By: Elgin Symphony Orchestra

Date: April 30, 2025



Jaimie Abney-Giraldo, a Fine Arts Coordinator for Elgin Area School District U-46, will be honored as “Educator of the Year” by the Elgin Symphony Orchestra during its May 3 concert.

Elgin Area School District U-46 Fine Arts Coordinator Jaimie Abney-Giraldo will be recognized for her exemplary dedication to enhancing music education by the Elgin Symphony Orchestra during its May 3 concert.

After a decade of teaching band and mariachi at U-46 schools, Abney-Giraldo has continued sharing her passion for music education and the arts as an administrator overseeing the district’s Fine Arts Programs.

“We are thrilled to honor one of Elgin’s leading and most experienced arts educators and advocates for access to arts education for all youth,” said Marc Thayer, CEO of the Elgin Symphony Orchestra, who will present Abney-Giraldo with the ESO’s Educator of the Year Award.

“Jaimie has partnered with the Elgin Symphony for many years and assisted music teachers throughout the U-46 District in elevating students’ music experiences through student attendance at the ESO’s youth education concerts at The Hemmens and hosting ESO musicians in their schools for classes, concerts and Adopt-a-School Programs,” Thayer said.

Abney-Giraldo’s commitment has helped lead U-46 to be recognized as one of the Best Communities for Music Education by the NAMM Foundation annually since 2019.

She has been with U-46 since 2005. In addition to her Fine Arts leadership in schools, Abney-Giraldo is also a sought-after expert on Mariachi education, presenting at the local, state and national levels, wrote a chapter in “The Music Teacher's Guide to Engaging English Language Learners on Mariachi Education,” and is a repeat contributor to School Band & Orchestra + Magazine on Mariachi Education.

This weekend’s concerts, led by conductor Chad Goodman, will feature Gustav Holst’s “The Planets,” György Sándor Ligeti’s “Lontano,” and Amadeus Mozart’s Symphony No. 31, “Paris.” The orchestra will be joined by sopranos and altos from the Elgin Master Chorale.

The concerts will be at 7:30 p.m. Saturday, May 3, and 2:30 p.m. Sunday, May 4, at the Hemmens, 45 Symphony Way in downtown Elgin.

Tickets start at \$20 and are available at www.ElginSymphony.org or by phone at (847) 888-4000 during ESO Box Office hours, Tuesday through Friday, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

About the Elgin Symphony Orchestra

The Elgin Symphony Orchestra, one of the preeminent regional orchestras in the U.S., is celebrating its 75th anniversary season in 2024-25.

The Elgin Symphony Orchestra is led by Chad Goodman, who was named the ESO’s Music Director — the fifth in the Orchestra’s history — in May 2023.

Since its founding in 1950, the organization has developed a reputation for artistic excellence, and innovative programming as demonstrated through its long history of highlighting the works of world-renowned conductors, composers, and musicians, and of promoting the advancement of women in the arts.

The ESO became a professional ensemble in 1985 in good part due to the leadership of the late Margaret Hillis, who served as the ESO’s music director from 1971 to 1985. Hillis was one of the first females to break through the male-dominated world of conducting and is credited with being the impetus behind the creation of the Elgin Symphony Orchestra Association, the formation of the ESO’s volunteer core — the Elgin Symphony League, and the start of the ESO’s commitment to music education and enrichment for youth.

Today, the ESO continues to draw its creativity and artistry from the Elgin area and gives back to the community through its Adopt-a-School program that provides supplemental music education and in-school performances to local schools; Musicians Care program that brings live music performances to local hospitals, hospices, and retirement homes; informational Listener's Club events and other free programs at public libraries; In Harmony Program in places of worship; Ainsworth Concerts for Youth; free tickets for youth under 18; open rehearsals; and free community concerts throughout the region.

The Illinois Council of Orchestras has named the ESO Orchestra of the Year four times (1988, 1999, 2005 and 2016). The ESO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

To learn more or to support the ESO, visit www.elginsymphony.org.

- Chicago Tribune/ The Courier News - Elgin News Digest: Elgin Area Firefighters Memorial Service set for Saturday; Ecker Center's open house part of fundraising campaign

By: Mike Danahey

Date: April 30, 2025



The 33rd annual Elgin Area Firefighters Memorial Service will be held from 10 a.m. to noon Saturday, May 3, at the Illinois Firefighters Memorial Plaza outside Elgin Fire Barn #5 Museum, 533 St. Charles St., Elgin.

Elgin Symphony Orchestra holding final 75th season concerts

The Elgin Symphony Orchestra will hold its final concerts of the 75th season at 7:30 p.m. Saturday, May 3, and 2 p.m. Sunday, May 4, at The Hemmens Cultural Center, 45 Symphony Way, Elgin.

During the Saturday concert, ESO CEO Marc Thayer will present School District U-46 Fine Arts Coordinator Jaimie Abney-Giraldo with the symphony's Educator of the Year Award.

“Jaimie has partnered with the Elgin Symphony for many years and assisted music teachers throughout the U-46 district in elevating students’ music experiences through student attendance at the ESO’s youth education concerts at The Hemmens and hosting ESO musicians in their schools for classes, concerts and Adopt-a-School programs,” Thayer said in a news release.

Conductor Chad Goodman will lead performances of Ligeti’s “Lontano,” Mozart’s Symphony No. 31, “Paris,” and Holst’s “The Planets.” The performances will feature sopranos and altos from the Elgin Master Chorale.

For tickets, go to www.elginsymphony.org/en/concerts-tickets. For more information, email boxoffice@elginsymphony.org or call 847-888-4000.

To read the full article, please click [here](#).

- Chicago Tribune/The Courier News - U-46 to increase of weekly physical education classes for elementary school students

By: Mike Danahey

Date: April 29, 2025



District U-46 elementary school students may have an extra day of physical education every week under a proposal being considered by the school board.

U-46 elementary school students would go from having one physical education class a week to two and kindergarten students from two classes to three under a proposed state waiver request.

A public hearing on the proposal was held Monday night by the school board, which is expected to approve the application for submission to the state at its May 5 meeting.

If the adjustment is authorized by the state, kindergarten students will be in compliance with state law, which requires a minimum of three PE classes be held per week. Elementary students will receive one day less than the minimum.

State rules allow school districts to request waivers to the class requirements for extenuating circumstances. U-46 secured such a waiver previously when wanting to reduce the number of classes from three to one for first- through sixth-grade students and from three to two for kindergarteners.

The district might be able to meet the state requirements for more elementary school students in the future as plans to move sixth-graders into middle schools proceed, Student Wellness Curriculum Coordinator Tracey Jakaitis said at the board meeting.

“We would love to have three days for everybody,” she said. “We looked at those numbers and analyzed what type of impact that would have in terms of safety, instruction, facilities, and we came up with kindergarten having the three and 1 through 6 having the two.”

The plan is to have 75% of U-46 elementary schools holding two PE classes for the same grade simultaneously in the main gym and a third PE class being held in the cafeteria or multipurpose room per day to accommodate the twice-a-week schedule, Jakaitis said.

Were they to try to conduct classes three days a week with sixth-graders still part of the elementary schools, some classes would have as many as 90 students, she said.

“At that point, it’s just too many. It’s not safe, and we’re not really able to teach the curriculum and assess our students,” Jakaitis said.

In addition to the public hearing, the school board Monday also tentatively approved the following proposals, which are to be formally approved May 5:

- Award 26 contracts for more than \$67.4 million in work on the new middle school being built on Rohrsen Road in Elgin. Tariffs could affect those costs and the plan to open the school in August 2027, something Deputy Superintendent of Operations Ann Williams said she would report back to the board on once projections are known.
- Award a \$600,000 contract to Pala Supply Co. to provide 8,027 classroom supply kits for the 2025-26 school year for students in kindergarten through sixth grade enrolled in Title 1 schools. Schools that surpass the Title 1 income qualifications will design their own supply kits, which families will have to purchase, Assistant Superintendent of Schools Annette Acevedo said.
- Award GameTime/Cunningham Recreation a \$174,000 contract for a picnic pavilion to be installed at Elgin High School’s Memorial Field. It will include two ADA accessible and six standard picnic tables, Executive Director of Facilities Sheila Downs said.

Similar structures are also planned for Larkin High School in Elgin and South Elgin High School, she said.

- Daily Herald -

‘I know I have hope’: Community rallies behind U-46 teacher in urgent need of a kidney

By: Vincent Pierri

Date: April 28, 2025



Katie Pappas teaches fifth-graders about cancer and self awareness in a health class at Timber Trails Elementary School in Hoffman Estates on Monday. She is awaiting a kidney transplant.

To her students at Timber Trails Elementary School in Hoffman Estates, Katie Pappas is more than a health teacher.

She is a source of encouragement, a steady presence, and someone who shows up every day, no matter what.

In 2017, Pappas received a kidney and pancreas transplant after her first battle with kidney disease. Now, her donated kidney is failing. Because the wait for a deceased donor can take up to seven years, her best chance for survival is finding a living donor. Her students know she is facing serious health challenges, but few realize the long nights Pappas spends on dialysis treatment, awaiting a new kidney.

“I am not doing great on dialysis,” said Pappas. “It is just getting a little too close for comfort. I know I have hope, I have time. But things are not as easy as they were the first go-around.”

After long days at school, Pappas, an 18-year teaching veteran, heads home, takes care of her dog, Colbi Jax, eats a quick dinner and connects to her dialysis machine for the night. Sessions can stretch from 11 to 12 hours each night. Sleep often is broken by the machine’s alarms or discomfort.



Katie Pappas at a table set up to provide information about the kidney donation process. Timber Trails Elementary School in Hoffman Estates hosted a community run and awareness events earlier this year to support her search for a donor.

Pappas' nightly dialysis regimen keeps her stable, but the treatment no longer fully filters her system, leaving her increasingly worn down. Yet, by 6 a.m., she is up again, ready to return to work motivated by love for her students.

In the classroom, the 40-year-old educator remains what she always has been — a leader, a mentor and an example of positivity and strength, those around her say.

"I show up every day on purpose," Pappas said. "With my lesson plans, my smile and my heart."

Each day, Pappas and her students recite what she calls the four affirmations: "I am strong. I am smart. I am loved. I never give up." It is a message she teaches and lives, her colleagues say.



Katie Pappas teaches fifth-graders about cancer and self awareness in a health class at Timber Trails Elementary School in Hoffman Estates on Monday. In 2017, Pappas received a kidney and pancreas transplant after her first battle with kidney disease. Now, her donated kidney is failing and she is awaiting a live kidney donation.

Colleagues describe Pappas as a source of constant encouragement, someone whose optimism and dedication lift the entire school community.

“Students love the way she makes them feel seen and heard,” said fellow teacher Lindsey Heimberg adding, Pappas connects with young people in genuine ways. “It is evident in watching kids flock to her in the hall every morning. She cares about her students, and they truly love her.”

Music teacher Alex Moliwell said Pappas leads by example.

“She models care and compassion for everyone she encounters,” Moliwell said. “I am inspired by the way she shares kindness, healthy boundaries, humility, respect and healing words of affirmation with all of us.”

Pappas said the lessons she teaches in the classroom have taken on even deeper meaning as she faces her own health challenges.

“I teach my students about kindness, about resilience, about showing up for people,” Pappas said. “And they show up for me.”

Earlier this year, Timber Trails hosted a community run and awareness events to support Pappas’ search for a donor.

Pappas said she feels deeply humbled that someone would consider donating a kidney to help her, calling it an act of kindness for which she struggles to feel deserving.

“It is overwhelming to have people say, ‘Are you kidding? Of course I am going to do it,’” Pappas said. “I still cannot believe someone would be willing to go through all that for me.”

According to the National Kidney Foundation, living kidney donors can go on to live long, healthy lives, with life expectancy comparable to or even exceeding that of the general population.

Anyone interested in being considered as a living donor can complete a confidential survey on the Northwestern Medicine Living Donor Program website at nmlivingdonor.org. Participants should include Pappas’ name when prompted.

“I would tell any potential donor that you are helping fulfill my purpose in life, to be here longer for these kids,” Pappas said.

- Daily Herald -

Softball notes: Wheaton North, South Elgin grab early leads in respective conference races

By: Mike Miazga

Date: April 30, 2025

South Elgin update: Coach Brad Reynard's team scored key Upstate Eight wins over West Chicago (3-2, Chloe Ricard walk-off double) and Riverside-Brookfield (10-0) to move to 7-0 in league play at week's start (14-4 overall).

Anna Kiel (.543 hitting, 14 RBI, 6-3 pitching, 0.60 ERA), Addison Tinerella (.485 hitting, 19 runs), catcher Ricard (.400 hitting, 8 doubles, 2 homers, 13 RBI, cited for excellence behind the plate), Emma Bell (.451 hitting, 10 RBI, 23 runs) and Jenna Sheehan (.377 hitting, 5 doubles, 2 triples, 2 homers, 14 RBI, 4-1 pitching, 1.32 ERA) have led the way for the Storm, which won 9 of 10 recent games. Kiel recently went over the 400 career strikeout mark and broke the school record for career doubles (37).

Elgin update: Grace Tetrev (.500 hitting) and Abby Mutolo (.410 hitting) are the offensive leaders for the Maroons (3-13, 2-6 Upstate Eight), who recently downed Streamwood 11-1.

Larkin update: The Royals scored a big 4-3 win over West Aurora where Ali Herrick homered to tie the game in the seventh and freshman Alexia Alonzo's hit won it. Mya Bermudez had 3 hits in the game, while Mackenzie Wemken earned the complete-game win in the circle for Megan Johnson's Royals (8-10, 4-5 Upstate Eight), who also have received key contributions from Julissa Aguinaga (.471 hitting, 24 RBI), Kenya Ventura (.360 hitting, 18 RBI) and Herrick (.349 hitting, 13 RBI).

Streamwood update: Pitcher Zanilla Jackson struck out 14 in the Sabres' come-from-behind 20-14 Upstate Eight win over East Aurora. Catcher Haily Dworak homered over the left-field fence in the fourth inning to break up a no-hitter against Bartlett.

To read the full article, please click [here](#).

- Daily Herald -

Baseball: Small ball helps South Elgin split series vs. West Aurora

By: Jerry Birchfield

Date: April 29, 2025

Using small ball to take the lead in the fourth inning and more conventional scoring methods in the seventh to put the game away, South Elgin handed West Aurora its third loss of the season with an 8-1 Upstate Eight West Division Conference decision Tuesday.

A well-executed bunted and aggressive base running plated three Storm runs in the top of the fourth. Five runs crossed the plate in a five-hit, eight-batter rally during South Elgin's half of the seventh.

The squads split the two-game series. West Aurora won Monday's game 5-4.

Wiggling out of jams in the second, third and fifth innings, Storm junior Zach Barkho pitched five and two-thirds innings to notch the win. The southpaw struck out seven, issued no walks and scattered six hits.

West Aurora's Jake Niedzwiedz spoiled Barkho's shutout bid with a sacrifice fly in the fifth that scored Mason Atkins.

"We're still finding out how we need to go about winning games and (small ball) is one thing that we have in our toolbox," said South Elgin coach Jim Kating. "We executed today. We had to put pressure on the other team to be able to do what we needed to do."

West Aurora (16-3, 9-2) starter Zach Toma faced only 10 batters in the first three innings with only Storm backstop Nathan Robertson reaching base on a Blackhawks infield error.

Junior Jake Sparacino opened South Elgin's half of the fourth by lacing a single to left center field. Four batters later, Jacob Roberston came to the plate with the bases loaded. The junior laid down a sacrifice bunt to the left side of the infield allowing Sparacino to score.

"I told myself that I've got to do my job," said Robertson. "I haven't been hitting the ball too much lately, so I just wanted to contribute anyway I could."

During Quentin Albert's at-bat, a pickoff throw to third base went into left field, bringing in another South Elgin (11-9, 7-1) run. Toma walked Albert. The senior made the turn at first base and continued to second drawing a throw from West Aurora catcher Brayden Jones that allowed Justin Pold to cross the plate for the final Storm run of the inning.

"That one inning got away from us. We had a few moments where we panicked a little bit and you know, gave them a little more than they had earned," said West Aurora coach John Reeves.

"I feel like we all were on the same page coming in. We knew we needed to play small ball in order to win this game," said Barkho. "Coming from yesterday, we knew the big shots weren't going to work."

In the second and third innings, West Aurora had runners in scoring position with only one out. Barkho ended the threats by retiring the next two batters.

"They had a good pitcher going, and early on that we had some opportunities to drive in some runs and unfortunately we didn't," Reeves said.

“Our starting pitchers did a great job today. Zach pounded the zone. He worked ahead,” Keating said. “Also, our defense also made some real good plays behind him.”

“My off-speed was working a lot today and my fastball was there when I needed it,” Barkho said. “We were starting out with a lot of off-speed trying to get West Aurora off-balance.”

- Chicago Tribune -

Down after sitting for a game, South Elgin’s Zacharia Barkho comes up big to beat West Aurora. ‘Wanted that win.’

By: Paul Johnson

Date: April 29, 2025



South Elgin's Zacharia Barkho (7) throws a pitch against West Aurora in the third inning of an Upstate Eight Conference game in Aurora on Tuesday, April. 29, 2025.

South Elgin’s Zacharia Barkho had a sinking feeling Monday when he arrived at the ballpark.

The junior right-hander knew he was late for practice Saturday, which meant he wasn’t going to be playing Monday. As he prepared for Tuesday’s start at West Aurora, he needed a boost.

“To be honest with you, my boys got me hyped up,” Barkho said. “I was late to practice Saturday, didn’t play (Monday). I was very upset. My boys got me hyped up coming out (Tuesday).”

“Ready to throw some gas and get them out. I wanted that win.”

Barkho learned his lesson and did just what he was hoping to do Tuesday in a 7-1 Upstate Eight Conference victory, outdueling West Aurora ace Zach Toma for the pitching win.

Barkho went 5 1/3 innings for the Storm (11-9, 7-1), striking out seven without a walk. He allowed the only run and gave up seven hits, all singles. Connor Lund and Jack Sparacino each had two hits and scored twice. Justin Pold scored twice and Quentin Albert added two hits.

Oscar Alexander, Chase Yusi and Toma tallied two hits apiece for West Aurora (18-3, 9-2).

Barkho, meanwhile, wiggled out of big jams in the both second and third innings and South Elgin rewarded him with three runs in the top of the fourth to help him settle in.

“Pitching with a lead is different,” Barkho said. “You get to get into your groove a little bit more. We just played some small ball, bunted the ball, got people around. And it worked out really well.”



South Elgin's Zacharia Barkho (7) signals catcher Nathan Robertson (16) in the sixth inning of an Upstate Eight Conference game in Aurora on Tuesday, April. 29, 2025.

Barkho threw his fastball, but mixing his off-speed pitches was the secret of his success Tuesday, much as it has been in his past three outings.

“The curveball was working well,” Barkho said. “I feel like they were pretty off-balance with it. They started catching up to it so I had to switch to a change-up. That started working pretty well for me.

“I felt really comfortable.”

South Elgin coach Jim Kating has noticed a difference in Barkho since the team returned from spring break.

“We came back from our spring trip and kind of learned about our team and ourselves,” Kating said. “He started well against Glenbard East and Lake Park, and I think other people followed.



West Aurora's Oscar Alexander (31) comes through with a base hit against South Elgin in the fifth inning of an Upstate Eight Conference game in Aurora on Tuesday, April. 29, 2025.

"He's been steadfast. His focus and his competitiveness have really shown the last three times."

In those three victories, two of which Barkho was credited with wins, Barkho pitched 19 1/3 innings, striking out 20 while allowing two runs on 13 hits and a pair of walks.

This was his most impressive win, going toe-to-toe with Toma, one of the area's hottest pitchers.

"His last three outings have been outstanding," Kating said of Barko. "He wanted the challenge. He wanted to pitch. He wanted to get us back on the winning side. He did a fantastic job."

The Blackhawks had plenty of chances, leaving runners on second and third in both the second and third innings. West Aurora coach John Reeves was impressed with how Barkho worked.



South Elgin's Zacharia Barkho, right, and Jack Zaimins (11) celebrating defeating West Aurora in an Upstate Eight Conference game in Aurora on Tuesday, April. 29, 2025.

"It looked like he was just pounding the zone," Reeves said of Barkho. "When it came time to execute a pitch, he executed the pitch."

Because of that, Barkho has turned into South Elgin's ace, although he didn't expect that to happen coming into the season.

"I didn't really know what to expect," Barkho said. "I knew I just had to come out and play some ball for the boys. I've had a fun season."

"Personally, I think I can still get better. I think I haven't seen my peak yet. I still want to keep getting better, throwing faster, better placement. I want to see zero runs up there every time out."