

Press Clippings 10/08/19

---Daily Herald---10/08/2019

U-46 could offer 23 career pathway programs

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A student grinds a piece of metal at Elgin High School in 2018. Welding is among the career pathways proposed as part of new academies at U-46's five comprehensive high schools and Dream Academy alternative school.

Elgin schools officials Monday night got a glimpse of 23 distinct career pathways proposed as part of new academies at the district's five comprehensive high schools and Dream Academy alternative school.

Each Elgin Area School District U-46 high school will house the same five college and career academies focusing on the fine arts, human services, business, liberal arts, and STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) fields by the 2021-22 school year. Those academies will comprise multiple educational pathways -- a multiyear sequence of courses -- allowing students to explore a field of interest as elective courses during their sophomore, junior and senior years while taking core classes and meeting rigorous college admission requirements.

Some pathways will be offered at all schools and others will be unique to one or two buildings based on site or equipment requirements.

Among the career pathways currently offered at select high schools are courses in automotive, welding, health care science and manufacturing. Those will be rolled into the new academies. Proposed career pathways by academy are:

- Business -- Finance and accounting, management and leadership, office assistant
- Fine arts -- 2-D art, 3-D art, Artes Folkloricas de Mexico, commercial and digital art, music recording and production, photography, theater arts
- Human services -- Early childhood education, hospitality and culinary arts, law, medical assistant, patient care technician, social advocacy
- Liberal arts -- Early college credit (designed to offer students a more traditional college prep experience)

- STEM -- automotive, engineering, environmental science, information technology, precision manufacturing, welding

Students will have the opportunity to earn industry certification, dual college credit and gain internship experience through the pathway programs, said Kinasha Brown, U-46 director of educational pathways.

They also can switch once enrolled in a particular pathway and choose courses offered only at select sites, even if it is not available at their home school. For instance, the district recently built a state-of-the-art welding lab at Elgin High School that won't be duplicated elsewhere, Brown said.

"We have students that are traveling within the district to attend pathways -- welding, automotive and culinary arts -- that are not offered within their home school," Brown said.

These small learning communities will emphasize rigor, relevance to current employment trends, relationships with peers and staff, and college and career readiness skills, officials said.

High school freshmen will be required to take a semesterlong seminar course that includes notetaking, study skills and career exploration before selecting an intentionally-designed sequence of courses housed within each academy.

"We are looking at the freshman year to be sort of a foundation year," Brown said.

Officials are reviewing how district facilities are being used with the goal of preparing for the launch of the new educational pathways.

Among the criteria officials used to determine which pathways to offer are local and national employment data, program design, teachers who meet state and industry licensing requirements to teach courses, and student interest based on test scores and surveys through Naviance, a web-based college and career readiness platform used in middle school and high school.

The district likely will hire instructors for some pathways and provide professional development for existing staff to be certified, Brown said.

Meanwhile, U-46's existing high school academies will become unique [magnet programs](#): STEM at Bartlett; International Baccalaureate Studies at Elgin; Visual and Performing Arts at Larkin; Beacon Academy of Media and Digital Arts at South Elgin; and World Languages International Studies at Streamwood.

The programs are in the process of being certified by Magnet Schools of America.

Town hall sessions are scheduled this month and next on pathways plans. They will run from 6 to 7:30 p.m.

- Oct. 17, Kenyon Woods Middle School, 1515 Raymond St., South Elgin
- Oct. 29, Eastview Middle School, 321 N. Oak Ave., Bartlett
- Nov. 5, Kimball Middle School, 451 N. McLean Blvd., Elgin

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