



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **U-46 to Celebrate Resilient Class of 2021**

*Socially distant commencement ceremonies to be held  
Saturday in NOW Arena*

**ELGIN** - More than 2,600 students whose senior year took place under the challenges of a global pandemic will be honored for their hard work and resilience on Saturday as School District U-46 hosts five high school graduation ceremonies at the NOW Arena in Hoffman Estates.

The U-46 Board of Education, Superintendent Tony Sanders, Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Schools Instruction and Equity Lela Majstorovic, and many other District administrators and principals will join families and friends in recognizing the Class of 2021.

"This group of seniors has faced specific challenges unlike any other graduating class before them — a global pandemic that started at the end of their junior year and stretched through the spring of their senior year, upending their academic, family and social lives," Sanders said. "Yet that is all the more reason to celebrate their perseverance and resilience. I am so proud of the Class of 2021, and I know they have bright futures ahead, perhaps made even brighter by the struggles they have overcome."

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, U-46 had planned for an outdoor drive-in-style ceremony in the parking lot of the NOW Arena for the Class of 2021. However, updated health guidelines allowed the ceremonies to be shifted inside, although COVID-19 mitigation strategies and safety protocols will still be followed.



Each graduate can bring four guests, who will need to ride in the same vehicle to the ceremony. The guests will be assigned to sit in a specific section, and arena seating areas will be arranged in "pods," with surrounding seats covered to ensure guests are socially distanced. Masks will be required for graduates, guests, and all staff inside the NOW Arena. All five ceremonies will be streamed live on each high school's website.

The graduation schedule Saturday, May 29 is as follows:

- 8 a.m. South Elgin High School
- 11 a.m. Elgin High School
- 2 p.m. Bartlett High School
- 5 p.m. Larkin High School
- 8 p.m. Streamwood High School

As it has done since 2018, the District will be honoring seniors who enrolled in the full-time Dual Credit program on the campus of Elgin Community College. These students, who must demonstrate certain college readiness benchmark scores for acceptance, take all of their courses at ECC. They earn both high school and college credit for each class in the program, which the District expanded this school year to include both high school seniors and juniors. The District expects to see its first group of students conferred with both their high school diploma and associate's degree graduate next year, among the Class of 2022.

During the first semester, the 42 graduating seniors in the Dual Credit program earned a total of 817 college credits. For graduation, they will be wearing special stoles, and they will participate in an end-of-the-year recognition ceremony at 11 a.m. Wednesday, May 26 at ECC.

Larkin High School senior Jesus Ojeda is graduating from the Dual Credit program with 16 college credits. When he decided to apply, one of the draws was being able to experience college as a high schooler. Because of



COVID-19, nearly all his classes were remote, however Jesus said it still provided “a great head start on the path to success.”

“It hasn't all worked out how I expected, but honestly, I expected that would happen too!” said Jesus, who plans to complete his associate’s degree at ECC and then pursue an art degree at Northern Illinois University. “As I graduate high school with these credits, I feel a sense of pride and accomplishment as I am achieving more than what I expected when I first started high school.”

The District's four-year graduation rate of 87 percent remains in step with the state’s average of 88 percent.

Forty-eight graduates rank among the top two percent of their graduating class within the five high schools. These students will attend top universities including the University of California-Berkeley, Syracuse University, Northwestern University, University of California-Los Angeles, Indiana University, Loyola University, DePaul University, and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, among many others.

The top two percent graduates are being showcased daily through the month of May on the District’s [Facebook page](#) and [Twitter](#), and all profiles also appear on our Class of 2021 [website page](#).

For the fifth year, U-46 will also issue a special honor to graduates who demonstrate a high level of proficiency in one or more languages in addition to English. The State of Illinois Seal of Biliteracy will be awarded to 122 graduating seniors, with six languages represented — Spanish, French, German, Polish, Japanese, and Russian. The number of students earning the Commendation, given to students who have demonstrated significant progress toward achieving a high level of proficiency, is 292, with a seventh language of Arabic represented in that category.



Students who earn the Seal can qualify for two years of foreign language credit at any Illinois public university; that translates to a combined total of \$257,664 in tuition savings for the recipients of this year's Seal, using the credit hour cost at ECC for calculation purposes.

The Class of 2021 graduates also include 20 Superintendent's Scholarship recipients who earned a \$1,000 scholarship and are in the first generation in their family to attend college. They are being featured on the [Facebook page](#) of the U-46 Educational Foundation, Twitter, as well as the District's Class of 2021 [website page](#).

One Superintendent's Scholarship recipient, Elgin High School's Julian Jarmula, called graduating during a pandemic "surreal." Julian, who also earned a Seal of Biliteracy in Polish, will be attending Northwestern University and plans to major in chemical engineering.

"Online learning was filled with a lot of uncertainty, but teachers and students alike helped each other to cope with it," he said. "Collaboration will most definitely be important in my future as life will always present challenges, and collaboration will be needed to solve those challenges."

Students in Illinois faced a new graduation requirement this year regarding the Free Application for Federal State Aid (FAFSA), a form that students use to apply for financial aid for college, graduate or career schools. To receive their diploma, students had to file a FAFSA application, fill out an alternative application for Illinois Financial Aid, or file a waiver/opt-out form with the District. As of May 21, 91 percent of U-46 seniors had completed the requirement, and efforts continue to close the gap before graduation day.

More details about the graduation ceremonies can be found on the U-46 website at [u-46.org/classof2021](http://u-46.org/classof2021).



**Class of 2021 Graduation Facts**

District Graduation Rate: 87 percent

State Graduation Rate: 88 percent

**Total number of graduates: 2,652**

Number of Bartlett High School graduates: 528

Number of Elgin High School graduates: 611

Number of Larkin High School graduates: 478

Number of South Elgin High School graduates: 610

Number of Streamwood High School graduates: 425

**Total Graduates in the Full-Time Dual Credit Program: 42**

**Graduates who earned Illinois State Seal of Biliteracy: 122**

*Languages: Spanish, Polish, German, French, Japanese, Russian*

**Total Commendation Toward Biliteracy: 292**

*Languages: Spanish, Polish, German, French, Japanese, Russian, Arabic*

**Total Top 2 Percent Graduates: 48**

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*School District U-46 serves families in 11 communities: Bartlett, Elgin, Hanover Park, South Elgin, Streamwood and Wayne, as well as portions of Carol Stream, Hoffman Estates, St. Charles, Schaumburg, and West Chicago. In total, the District encompasses 90 square miles within the Fox River Valley, approximately 45 minutes west of downtown Chicago, and includes communities within Cook, DuPage and Kane counties. More than 37,000 pre-K through twelfth graders attend the 57 District schools and*



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*programs. To learn more, visit the U-46 website, or like us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter.*