

## Press Clippings 01-27-21

---The Courier-News--- 01/27/2021

CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK

### U-46 union wants more safety measure data

Teachers group continues to fear return to school

By: Karie Angell Luc

The Elgin Teachers Association president told the District U-46 School Board Monday that teachers remain fearful of returning to the classroom and want detailed information on COVID-19 safety measures released to them.

Among Barbara Bettis' requests on behalf of the union was data on contract tracing, exact numbers on the each school's hybrid program enrollment and proof that classrooms are being adequately cleaned.

"Not having this clearly defined and communicated at this time adds to the distrust of the current safety situation," Bettis said. "This also adds to the stressors of teachers being in buildings and the perspective by teachers that the safety plan is not complete."

Faculty members are also concerned some families are not completing the self-certification process in which they check their children for coronavirus symptoms before sending them to school, she said.

"These are some of the issues that are impacting the feeling of distrust amongst teachers and to have confidence in the district with regards to safety plan, teacher respect and value, and other implications," she said.

"Collaboration is in the best interest for all with the right people at the table. We need to address these issues and resolve them immediately."

While not addressing the specific demands, board President Sue Kerr said they're aware of the teachers' concerns as well as those of parents who want to see their children back in school again.

"We're trying to balance everything," Kerr said.

Students signed up for the hybrid program have been returning to school in phases, with high school juniors and seniors starting in-person classes on a part-time basis Monday.

Olivia Powell, a senior at South Elgin High School and student advisor to the school board, said she hadn't been back in a classroom since March 2020.

"Believe it or not, I could not wait to sit in a desk again," Powell said. "Although it was very different, I was so glad to be back.

"All safety protocols were followed," she said. "I felt really safe at school."

U-46 Superintendent Tony Sanders said seeing students follow all the safety precautions has "been a joy," adding he's unaware of any issues with students wearing masks or other PPE since in-person classes resumed earlier this month.

"The past two weeks have gone pretty well," Sanders said. "I can't thank our teachers enough for their dedication to their craft."

Scott Sternal, ETA first vice president, said union members do not feel the same.

“Teachers have felt replaceable,” Sternal said. “Our teachers have felt as though they are not being heard. ... When school is safe, real learning can happen.”

## **U-46 classes go remote after snowfall**

**By: Gloria Casas**



The falling snow Tuesday made for a picturesque scene at Lords Park in Elgin.

A storm that dropped nearly six inches of snow closed Elgin area schools, including those in District U-46, but there was no snow day for students.

Thanks to remote learning, the cherished childhood tradition is yet another thing being relegated to the history books.

The storm started late Monday and continued through the day Tuesday. By Tuesday afternoon, Elgin had about 5.8 inches of snow on the ground and other areas had as much as 9 inches, according to Brett Borchardt, a meteorologist for the National Weather Service.

“It’s the biggest snowfall the area has had since April 19, 2019,” Borchardt said. The snowfall total that day was 5.4 inches.

Midwest winters have been becoming milder, he said, and this winter in particular has been warmer and has had far less snowfall than in previous years.

The rest of the week is expected to be dry, Borchardt said. There’s a system building in the west but it’s too early to say if it will result in snow for the suburban Chicago area, he said.

The start of the storm Monday night triggered Elgin’s Snow Command, which issued social media updates on public works crews’ efforts to plow city streets. Elgin Police Department also used social media to notify residents about snow route enforcement.

Under city ordinances, any vehicle parked along streets deemed to be snow routes will be towed in order to keep them open for snow plows. About two dozen vehicles had been relocated as of Tuesday afternoon, police said.

U-46 officials announced schools would be closed for hybrid classes about 5 a.m. Tuesday. As a result, all students switched to an e-learning schedule in which teachers use Zoom to interact with their classes, which is now district policy on snow days.

Before the pandemic, such a transition would not have been possible because only students in 5th to 12th grade had laptop computers, district spokeswoman Mary Fergus said. Additionally, internet access has been provided for many families, she said.

“It’s exciting that we can offer online learning when conditions prohibit students from getting to a school building and it’s amazing that we have been able to make that option available over the course of a few months, between March and August,” Fergus said.

“We feel confident that teachers and students can pivot to online teaching and learning on any given day,” she said. “That said, we hope — and believe — there will still be time in the day for a little frolicking in the snow.”

And on the plus side, she added, students won’t have to make up for a lost day at the end of the school year.

**---Daily Herald--- 01/27/2021**

## **U-46 teachers say hybrid learning is causing inequities**

**By: Madhu Krishnamurthy**



Elgin Area School District U-46 teachers say hybrid in-person classes are putting teachers at risk and leaving Latino students behind.

Teachers in Elgin Area School District U-46 say the district’s hybrid learning plan is creating more inequities, especially for Latino students, and not adequately addressing pandemic-related safety concerns.

Latinos comprise 55% of the 37,241 students at the district. They also have been struggling the most as many Hispanic families choose not to send their students to school, Jose Rosa, a teacher at Huff Elementary School in Elgin, told the school board Monday night.

U-46 students returned in-person classes this month after being in remote learning mode for much of the fall semester.

“When we started conversations last semester on how to create a hybrid system that can help our students, especially our minorities in need, the idea was for them to return to school. The ironic part is that the Hispanic community decided not to return to school,” Rosa said. “Our schools are empty because the community doesn’t feel safe, especially the Hispanic community.”

Some hybrid classrooms have two to four in-person students, while simultaneously more than 20 students learn remotely, Rosa said.

Scott Sternal, Elgin Teachers Association first vice president who teaches at Abbott Middle School, said employee safety is being compromised, with many teachers forced to teach in-person classes despite seeking accommodations for special circumstances, such as protecting vulnerable family members.

“Over the last month, our teachers have felt replaceable,” he said. “Our teachers have felt as though they are not being heard.”

Among the problems, Sternal said, is teachers don’t completely understand the district’s COVID-related contact tracing procedures and policy for sick days.

School board President Sue Kerr said district leaders are aware of teachers’ concerns and welcome the input.

“But we also hear from parents who are very concerned about their kids not being in the classroom so we’re trying to balance everything,” she added.

Superintendent Tony Sanders said the past two weeks of hybrid classes have been successful.

“It’s been a joy to see kids actually following our protocols, masking up,” he said. “We actually have returned a few classrooms to distance learning as we committed to do if we have people on quarantine and unable to staff them. We do have several classrooms that are currently being taught remotely.”

Employees have had training on the contact tracing process, and resources are posted on the district’s intranet site, he added.

**---ABC 7--- 01/26/2021**

## **New kind of 'snow day' for school kids amid COVID-19 pandemic**

Mary suburban students returned to in-person classes for the first time this school year on Monday but thanks to the snow storm, it’s remote learning

You can find the link to the video [here](#).