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Elgin council backs continued partnership with education group

By: Rick West



Tony Sanders

Characterizing it as an economic benefit to the city, the Elgin City Council members voted to recommend continuing the partnership with a group that aims to provide greater emphasis on education.

The committee of the whole voted 8 to 1 Wednesday to contribute \$20,000 annually for the next three years to the Alignment Collaborative for Education. The full council will vote on the measure at its April 14 meeting.

The only opposition came from Councilman Toby Shaw who questioned the funding.

ACE was created in 2015 to represent and coordinate efforts among communities served by Elgin Area School District U-46 to support success in the public schools. Elgin contributed \$15,000 annually for first three years to help establish the organization and in 2018 renewed the partnership for three more years at \$20,000 annually with an eye toward improving Elgin's overall workforce readiness.

Other founding members that still support the initiative include District U-46, the United Way of Metro Chicago, Grand Victoria Foundation and Elgin Community College. ACE is also funded by other local businesses, grants, foundations, and in-kind contributions.

Its focus is to provide greater emphasis on early education, trauma-informed care and educational pathways.

For 2019, only 15% of children were assessed as kindergarten-ready and less than 35% of third-graders met recommended language and math proficiency levels. U-46 estimates more than 30% of its students experience multiple adverse childhood experiences and approximately 61% of U-46 students are low-income.

And the pandemic has made things more challenging, Superintendent Tony Sanders said.

"I hate the term 'learning loss', but coming on the heels of this pandemic, we have a lot of gaps, not only in education, but in social services," Sanders said. "It's going to take the full community to address the needs long-term."

Mayor David Kaptain said ACE "pays great dividends for us."

"When we started this, the goal was partly to help U-46, but it was really as an economic development tool for the city of Elgin," Kaptain said, adding it has "brought millions of dollars in investment back to the city of Elgin because the businesses that come here."

Shaw said his opposition wasn't about ACE, but who should fund it.

"I feel like this is almost like an extension of U-46, and that's not the role of the city," Shaw said. "Yes, I believe in the mission. Yes, I get what you're doing. But from a funding perspective, we don't fund U-46. It's a separate entity."

Councilperson Tish Powell said as one of the state's largest communities, Elgin needs to address big-city problems like poverty and education.

"I see the Alignment Collaborative assisting in raising up people, making sure that they have the education and skills they need to get high quality jobs when they graduate from high school and will allow them to remain in our community, purchase homes and raise their families," Powell said. "So this is an investment in our community."