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U-46 to launch new elementary school program that will revolutionize how classes are taught

By: Mike Danahey



(www.u-46.org)

School District U-46 will embark on a new plan for elementary school students this fall that Superintendent Tony Sanders says will completely transform the look and feel of classes while getting children more engaged in their education.

The U-46 Rising program will “assist us with developing student-led academic teams that will increase student agency, collaboration and proficiency,” U-46 Deputy Superintendent of Instruction Suzanne Johnson told the school board Monday night.

It will be a move away from teacher-directed instruction to “classrooms where students drive their learning and their peers’ learning through inquiry, exploration, creativity and collaboration, and our teachers support this learning as facilitators and guides,” Johnson said.

Josh Carpenter, assistant superintendent for teaching and learning, said education has barely changed in the last 100 years, and current methods are not working, even with increased standards and resources.

“Now we have to shift. We have to make changes to our practices,” Carpenter said.

He noted that in the traditional classroom, “almost 80% of the time the teacher does most of the talking and students are passive listeners.”

“In the student-led academic teaming environment, students drive their own learning, holding themselves accountable to reach their learning targets, while the teacher shifts to the role of facilitator and verifies learning,” Carpenters said. “In this kind of environment, we would see 70% team and 30% direct instruction.”

The effort will begin this August in U-46 elementary schools, with five “equity and rigor” campuses part of an intensive pilot program incorporating the new model. The schools chosen are Creekside and Channing in Elgin, Willard in South Elgin, and Laurel Hill and Parkwood in Hanover Park.

School officials stressed the work will be a “non-linear process,” where educators learn as they go to develop a system.

“Change will take time, but we are proud to begin this work this summer with extensive preparation and planning and to initiate the work across all elementary schools and a group of consortia secondary (level) teachers,” Johnson said.

Eventually, she said, the method will “touch all 57 sites, all classrooms and all programs to best support student learning and prepare our students to contribute and thrive in our current world and the world beyond us.”

School board member Eva Porter, who is a retired teacher, said she’s excited about U-46 Rising and to see the district venture into something new.

“We do need to change,” Porter said.

Jessica Pearce, student advisor to the board, said she had been in classes using the team-based method. She found it to be much more engaging than a traditional classroom and that she learned more than she may have because of the setup.

“I’m excited to see where this goes,” Pearce said.