

Press Clippings - 3/10/2023

– Northern Public Radio –

How Illinois schools are trying to make their teacher workforce more diverse to help all students

March 9, 2023

By Peter Medlin - Northern Public Radio

<https://www.northernpublicradio.org/wnij-news/2023-03-09/how-illinois-schools-are-trying-to-make-their-teacher-workforce-more-diverse-to-help-all-students>

In so many Illinois schools, teachers don't look like their students. 27% of Illinois K-12 students are Hispanic, but only 8% of teachers. About 17% of students are Black, but only 6% of teachers.

This isn't just an Illinois issue. Across the country, students are much more racially diverse than their educators. A recent state-by-state analysis from The Education Trust found that Illinois has provided readily accessible data, set goals for teacher diversity and is intentionally recruiting diverse educators.

But in some of the state's most diverse school districts, the disparity is wide. For example, in Rockford Public Schools, race is pretty evenly distributed. Close to a third of students are white, a third are Hispanic, and a third are Black. But Rockford teachers? Not so much. 87% are white, while 4% are Hispanic and 4% are Black. And that hasn't changed in the past 10 years.

Dr. Laurie Elish-Piper is the dean of the College of Education at Northern Illinois University.

"Research has really indicated," she said, "that if, for example, Black students have a single Black teacher in their elementary school experience, it makes them much more likely to graduate from high school, it increases the likelihood of them having higher grades, and more positive attitudes towards school."

Per the research, if Black students have one Black teacher in elementary school, they're

13% more likely to enroll in college. If they have two Black teachers? It jumps to over 30% This is referred to as the “Role Model Effect.”

And research suggests that more diverse teachers benefit all students, academically and socially.

The Illinois State Board of Education has set several statewide goals to increase teacher diversity -- starting with teacher candidate students at schools like NIU.

Dr. Jen Kirmes is the executive director of teaching and learning at the Illinois State Board of Education. She says their strategic plan aimed to increase the number of students of color in educator prep programs, like that at NIU, every year from 2020-2023.

“The specific goal was 5% per year,” she said, “for the three years of our strategic plan.”

Kirmes says they’ve hit those goals in the first two years they have data for. This past year, it went up 6%.

Back in 2018, The State Board outlined a goal to not just increase the number of minority teacher candidates, but the number of licensed teachers by 2025. Kirmes says they no longer have a specific goal for licensed teachers but have goals to increase retention rates.

Over the past few years, the state and individual school districts have invested more and more into “grow-your-own” teacher programs. That’s where schools seek out students in their district who might be interested in becoming a teacher or help staff already working in the school get their teaching license.

Kirmes says there are more than 10,000 Illinois students participating in these “early pathway programs.”

“These programs are a majority of young people of color,” she said, “which makes them a much closer match to the student body than what the current teacher workforce looks like.”

Elish-Piper and NIU have forged several different “grow-your-own” pathways with different school districts in northern Illinois over the past few years. Their PLEDGE program helps prepare elementary school teachers with bilingual endorsements.

She says 200 teacher candidates have gone through or are currently going through the program.

One of their partnerships is with the **U-46 school district** in Elgin -- one of the largest in

the state. More than half of U-46 students are Hispanic. Even though their teacher demographics don't perfectly match that, they have made progress. In the past 10 years, the number of U-46 teachers of color has increased 11%.

Mireya Pérez is the director of human resources at U-46. She says they've invested a lot into their dual language programs. So, that means needing to hire bilingual teachers. Perez says they recruit teachers from Mexico, Spain and Puerto Rico. They go to Puerto Rico every year for job fairs.

Recently, they've started working with Tennessee State, a Historically Black University.

"We're trying to recruit and offer opportunities for students to come here and do their student teaching, said Perez, "in hopes of having them come and teach with U-46."

The West Chicago Elementary School District 33 has also made strides to increase teacher diversity -- especially when it comes to Hispanic teachers. 80% of their students are Hispanic.

The district has increased the number of Hispanic teachers by 10% since 2014 which, according to its HR director Mark Truckenbrod, is also when it started developing a dual language program. They now have those programs in each of their elementary schools.

"We know that culture is a big part of educating," said Truckenbrod. "If I feel like I belong, or if I know my teacher feels I belong in that classroom, then I'm more apt to connect and listen to what's being said, being taught and the challenges that I have."

Since then, they've been actively trying to "grow-their-own" through partnerships with local universities and online coursework. He says they're also talking about how to offer childcare to employees who want to get a teaching license but have financial barriers.

"Our teaching forces haven't been diversified enough," he said, "and that's a direct result of not having access to higher education."

But Truckenbrod says in West Chicago, they plan to keep diversifying their teacher workforce so that the classroom truly reflects the community.

That's the hope the others have as well -- for their districts, and for all of Illinois.

– Daily Herald –

**Endorsements: Kerr, Thommes, Khan and
Schwartz for Elgin Area School District U-46 board**

March 10, 2023

By The Daily Herald Editorial Board



Susan Kerr



Kate Thommes

The choice of who will lead the Elgin Area **School District U-46 board** the next four years is a tough one, with six candidates, each having much to offer, running for four open seats.

Incumbents **Sue Kerr and Kate Thommes** and challengers Samreen Khan, Heather LH Manzella, Maureen Morris and Chanda Schwartz bring a wealth of experience to the table.

Kerr, 66, of Bartlett, has served two terms on the school board since 2015 and led the panel as president for the last four. Her institutional knowledge is valuable to maintain continuity of policy work already in play. She would like an opportunity to see through to the finish many initiatives started during her tenure, including the transition to a grade 6-8 middle school model, expansion of the preschool program and **U-46 rising**, an initiative bringing rigor, collaboration and critical thinking into the classroom, plus multiple building projects if a tax hike referendum passes.

Thommes, 48, of Elgin, has served one term on the board. She also is a former U-46 educator and district parent, giving her a multifaceted perspective on issues. She particularly has been vocal about special education and dual language needs and would like to see through **Unite U-46** and diversity and inclusion efforts, among other initiatives.

Khan, 44, of Bartlett, is a government consultant for the state of Illinois and has experience collaborating with a variety of stakeholders including federal, state and local elected officials, community leaders and constituents. Having navigated **U-46** policies and programs such as early intervention for her child, Khan seeks to advocate for

students to ensure they graduate with skills needed to be successful and that teachers and staff are supported.

Schwartz, 46, of Bartlett, is an admissions officer for Northwestern University and chair of the **U-46 Community Advisory Council**, community co-chair of **Unite U-46** and an operating board member of the Alignment Collaborative for Education. As a district parent, she has advocated for a child with special needs and worked alongside parents, community members and district employees to support the needs of all students.

Morris, of Streamwood, has been a paraprofessional in special education classrooms and a special-education teacher. She now serves as a direct support professional at a group home for adults with disabilities. She seeks to help improve declining proficiency levels in English language arts and mathematics.

Manzella, 52, of Elgin, a substitute teacher for Schaumburg Elementary District 54, brings classroom experience and a drive to improve student performance in English, math and science.

We believe **Kerr and Thommes** have strong institutional knowledge and experience to build on, while Khan and Schwartz would bring a rich diversity of perspective and fresh ideas to the board.

Kerr, Thommes, Khan and Schwartz are endorsed.

– Elgin Courier-News –

The Courier-News 2022-23 All-Area Team

March 10, 2023

By Patrick McGavin - Naperville Sun Boys First Team

Ben Alvarez, Yorkville, junior, 220 pounds: Captured Class 3A state title with win in tiebreaker. Finished 42-8. Also led Foxes to fourth-place finish in state.

Jayden Colon, St. Charles East, senior, 145: Stunned Moline's Noah Tapia, who was undefeated, for Class 3A state title. Finished 45-5. Also helped Saints win state title.

Ben Davino, St. Charles East, junior, 126: Ended up perfect 54-0 and won third straight state title. Also powered Saints to first Class 3A dual team state championship.

Dominic Ducato, Jacobs, senior, 113: Combined toughness, speed and power in taking third in Class 3A. Finished 35-3. Three-time state qualifier.

Ty Edwards, Yorkville Christian, junior, 120: Finished second in Class 1A and helped Mustangs to dual team state runner-up finish. Went 49-7.

Kaden Fetterolf, Batavia, senior, 152: Won first 43 matches before finishing fourth at state. Ended up 48-3. Two-time all-area.

Jameson Garcia, Marmion, senior, 126: Lost in overtime against Davino in state championship match. Finished 44-5. Two-time state champ. Led Cadets to second place in Class 3A. Committed to Harvard.

Jackson Gillen, Yorkville Christian, senior, 170: Took second in Class 1A after winning state title last season. Finished 46-7. Powered Mustangs to dual team runner-up finish. Two-time all-area.

Tyler Guerra, St. Charles East, junior, 138: Improved on third-place finish last season by reaching state championship match. Went 50-6. Helped Saints beat Marmion for Class 3A dual team state title.

Jack Leshner, Marmion, junior, 182: Beat Pekin's Shamon Handegan, who was undefeated, for Class 3A state title. Finished 37-6. Led Cadets to dual team state runner-up finish. Two-time all-area.

Dom Munaretto, St. Charles East, freshman, 106: Finished 54-0 in winning state championship. Win by fall secured Saints' comeback in quarterfinals over defending state champion Mount Carmel.

Sean Scheck, Marmion, senior, 285: Finished third in state with 38-9 record. Helped Cadets reach Class 3A dual team state championship match.

Taythan Silva, Aurora Christian, senior, 152: Pulled out 1-0 win for Class 2A state title. Finished 39-7. Committed to Army.

Luke Zook, Yorkville, sophomore, 170: Breakout season punctuated by third-place finish at state. Went 47-9. Helped Foxes earn fourth-place team trophy in Class 3A.

Girls First Team

Yamilet Aguirre, Yorkville, junior, 120: Reach state championship match after finishing fourth last season. Went 37-4. Won tournaments at Niles West and Larkin.

Emma Engels, Bartlett, sophomore, 100: Became the first girls state champion in program history. Finished 37-12, including a 26-11 record against boys.

Sydney Perry, Batavia, junior, 145: One of the best amateur female wrestlers in the world. Captured second consecutive state championship.

Kameyah Young, East Aurora, sophomore, 100: Earned fourth-place finish in the state. Went 32-4. Also won conference and sectional titles.

Honorable Mention

Cael Andrews, Batavia, senior, 145; Demetrios Carrera, South Elgin, freshman, 106; Deven Casey, Aurora Christian, sophomore, 113; Nicholas Garcia, Marmion, sophomore, 106; Braden Hunter, Aurora Christian, senior, 285; Adam Lambaz, Elgin, senior, 285; Porter Leith, Dundee-Crown, senior, 195; Tyler Martinez, Yorkville Christian, senior, 160; AJ Marino, St. Charles East, senior, 126; Brittney Moran, West Aurora, sophomore, 190; Noah Quintana, West Aurora, junior, 160; Ionnica Rivera, West Aurora, junior, 155; Bryan Romero, East Aurora, senior, 220; Dominic Serio, West Aurora, sophomore, 145; Brooklyn Sheaffer, Kaneland, sophomore, 120; Ashlyn Strenz, Sandwich, junior, 115; Josh Vazquez, Aurora Christian, sophomore, 120; James Wright, Jacobs, senior, 132.