

# Press Clippings - 3/24/2023

## – Daily Herald –

### **Election 2023: Elgin Area School District U-46 Six candidates running for four, 4-year seats in the April 4 consolidated election; Maureen Morris did not submit a questionnaire**

March 24, 2023 Print Copy

### **Susan E. Kerr**



*Susan Kerr*

#### **Bio**

Town: Bartlett

Age on Election Day: 66

Occupation: Retired

Employer: Retired

Previous offices held: **U-46 school board** (2015-present)

## Q&A

Q: Why are you running for this office, whether for reelection or election the first time? Is there a particular issue that motivates you?

A: I am running for my third term because the district has major initiatives that I would like to see completed.

These include 1.) The transition to a grade 6-8 middle school and the expansion of preschool. This will involve curricular revisions, support for teachers and students, and boundary changes.

2.) The expansion of U-46 rising, an initiative which is bringing rigor, collaboration, and critical thinking into the classroom. I have been impressed not only by the presentations the board has received on this subject, but also by the student engagement and enthusiasm I have seen on my visits to classrooms.

3.) The introduction of an International Baccalaureate (IB) program to the academy at **Elgin High School**.

4.) Multiple building projects if the referendum passes.

Q: What is the role of the school board in setting and monitoring curriculum?

A: Curriculum development in **U-46** is a detailed process which has several stages before a curriculum and/or its accompanying resources come before the school board.

It begins with a “call to committee,” which gathers together teachers and administrators to outline the curriculum, identify resources and professional development, and pilot the program.

The curriculum is vetted by the Instructional Cabinet and Instructional Council before it comes before the school board. It is the role of the school board to ask questions, look at the financial implications, and vote.

It is also the role of the board to listen to concerns from parents about the curriculum and bring those to the attention of the administration.

Q: Are there curriculum issues within the district that you feel need particular attention from the board?

A: There are no curriculum issues within the district that I am concerned about, but I believe the board and administration must closely monitor legislation in Springfield.

Some of the legislation includes mandates that, while well-intentioned, add additional subjects to the school day or may not allow much local flexibility.

The board and administration must work with local legislators, the Illinois Association of School Boards, and the Illinois State Board of Education to ensure our views are heard.

Q: How do you view your role in confronting policy or curriculum controversies: provide leadership even if unpopular, give a voice to constituents — even ones with whom you disagree, or defer to state authorities?

A: As a leader I try to listen to all sides of an issue and to understand the concerns that are being voiced. I try to weigh all the facts and do what is best for the children of the district. Curriculum controversies are difficult, but U-46 gives parents the option to request an alternative assignment or resource for their child.

Q: Concerns are growing regarding a new resurgence of the pandemic. If another massive outbreak of infectious disease occurs, what have we learned from the COVID-19 pandemic that will guide your decision making?

A: If there is another massive outbreak of an infectious disease, I would hope that we would not have to close schools again. My decisions, however, will be guided by experts in the field of public health, including our local health departments and Illinois Department of Public Health.

Q: Describe your experience working in a group setting to determine policy. What is your style in such a setting to reach agreement and manage school district policy? Explain how you think that will be effective in producing effective actions and decisions of your school board.

A: In the past eight years I have worked collaboratively with my fellow board members. My style is to listen to other points of view and to work toward reaching a consensus.

We have done this when reviewing our board policies and negotiating the superintendent's contract. As board president I am frequently in contact with other board members to get their views on various issues.

Q: What makes you the best candidate for the job?

A: I care about students and their education. I want U-46 to be an outstanding district with great opportunities. I want our staff to love working in this district. I want our communities to be proud of us. I am willing to work hard to make that happen.

Q: What's one good idea you have to better your district that no one is talking about yet?

A: I would love to see one or more magnet elementary schools in our district.

# Kathleen ‘Kate’ Thommes



*Kathleen “Kate” Thommes*

## **Bio**

Town: Elgin

Age on Election Day: 48

Occupation: Educator

Employer: No answer given

Previous offices held: **Elgin School District U-46 board** since 2019

## **Q&A**

**Q:** Why are you running for this office, whether for reelection or election the first time? Is there a particular issue that motivates you?

**A:** Since April of 2019, I have enjoyed my time on the **U-46 board of education** and would like to continue to serve our students, families, and schools. I have a unique perspective as an educator, parent, and community member that allows me to consider all sides of an issue.

My own children have participated in special education, Dual Language, Academies, the arts, and athletic teams. I am a **former U-46 educator** and a present member of a labor union. My family has called **U-46** and Elgin home for over 20 years.

I am motivated by our community and schools. Our programs, classes, and teachers prepare our students for the greater world.

On the board, we have started good work with the **Unite U-46** initiatives and our diversity and inclusion efforts. We have a balanced budget. We have well thought out plans to expand our schools. We have brought in new curriculum, updated our board policies, and I would like the ability to continue with those, and more.

Q: What is the role of the school board in setting and monitoring curriculum?

A: The teachers and staff in **U-46** are well qualified to determine the best choices for our students. They have an extensive process with committees made up of multiple members from multiple schools and departments asking for input from all relevant sources.

Each piece of curriculum brought to the board has been well reviewed and well vetted, narrowed down from multiple choices. As a board member, I have been given the opportunity to review multiple pieces of curriculum and, as an educator, I feel well qualified to do so. Our role is to review the curriculum with an eye to the district's mission and goals as well as the students and their needs. Our role is not to second guess or micromanage the experts in student learning and growth.

Our role is to support the teachers and staff with growing and developing the programs and curriculum that make our students successful during and after their time in **U-46**.

Q: Are there curriculum issues within the district that you feel need particular attention from the board?

A: While the board of education reviews and approves all curriculum put forth by teachers and staff, they should not be micromanaging the curriculum choices made by teachers and staff in **U-46**.

The issues arise when a board of education oversteps that role and prevents teachers from doing what they do best.

We do have an important role in continuing the district's mission of educating all students. All Means All.

Curriculum should reflect the students who attend our schools. It should reflect the 21st century. It should reflect the diversity, inclusion, and equity the board of education has as district goals.

The board of education is responsible for the greater picture, not the bits and pieces.

The teachers in **U-46** do an excellent job of choosing and implementing an excellent curriculum. I look forward to supporting them as they continue to do so.

Q: How do you view your role in confronting policy or curriculum controversies: provide

leadership even if unpopular, give a voice to constituents — even ones with whom you disagree, or defer to state authorities?

A: The primary role of a board of education is guiding and implementing policy. Our present U-46 board does this well.

We spent a significant portion of our meetings in spring 2022 updating board policy. I am very proud of my role in those updates.

Our community members had, and continue to have, many ways to reach out to board members, and we appreciate it when they do.

Emails, phone calls, social media outreach, even conversations in grocery stores and high school gyms help make it clearer and avoid confrontations and controversy. Even when I disagree with the input, I always appreciate a different perspective from different experiences and beliefs.

Good leaders keep their eye on the end goal: all students getting a quality education that prepares them for a world we are entering. Good leaders continue to do what is best for students, teachers, and our schools by listening to all stakeholders and making the best choices available to them.

Q: Concerns are growing regarding a new resurgence of the pandemic. If another massive outbreak of infectious disease occurs, what have we learned from the COVID-19 pandemic that will guide your decision making?

A: COVID taught us all so much about so many things. We learned about how fragile life is. We learned that our entire world can change in the space of just a couple weeks. It taught us that students can be resilient and need additional help and support. It taught us that teachers can be resilient and need additional help and support.

We learned that there are no perfect decisions. We learned that we can overcome a lot when we work together. As a present board member, we will continue to follow our public health departments' guidance. Since U-46 covers three counties and the state of Illinois, we have a lot of pieces to manage.

If we were to have another pandemic, I know that we need to continue listening to all stakeholders. We need to be agile and willing to adapt and change with a moment's notice. Above all though, doing the best we can for all students, rather than just one group's needs or another's louder shouts needs to be the goal.

Q: Describe your experience working in a group setting to determine policy. What is your style in such a setting to reach agreement and manage school district policy? Explain how you think that will be effective in producing effective actions and decisions of your school board.

A: I have worked for the last 4 years on the U-46 board of education and the last 20-plus

years in education working to create and implement policy and curriculum.

I have found that the best way to move forward is to listen to, and consider, all sides to each concern.

All stakeholders deserve a voice when making decisions affecting U-46. I work to educate myself about all of the issues in every decision. I rely on the knowledge and skills of administration and my fellow board members. I willingly admit that I don't know it all but am willing to learn all that I can.

As a board of education member, I have proven that I am ready, willing, able to determine policy and to make the tough decisions. As a longtime educator, I have the skills and knowledge to be effective in making decisions regarding curriculum and policy in U-46.

Q: What makes you the best candidate for the job?

A: I am an excellent choice to maintain my seat on the U-46 board of education because I have proven that I am an effective leader who listens to and supports the students, families, and teachers of U-46.

I plan on continuing to do so. My years of experience as an educator and parent have prepared me to do the work needed to keep U-46 successful.

My family is invested in U-46. One of my children is finding great success in college because U-46 prepared her well. The other two are continuing to get ready for the world because of U-46. My family is invested in our communities and what they offer. I would be honored if my community elected me to serve another 4 years.

Q: What's one good idea you have to better your district that no one is talking about yet?

A: U-46 has grown and changed so much in the 20-plus years I have been involved. We have built new buildings, diversified staff and curriculum, and provided a quality education for thousands upon thousands of students.

One thing U-46 has done well is to generate ideas for new programs and classes. Our ideas grow and develop from the community we have created; the people who make U-46 better. Rather than one person determining the ideas and directions, we do better when we work together and grow ideas as a unit.

All means all, again. We are truly better together. As a board member, I will continue to set policy and strategic goals to provide students, staff, and the community the ability and space to do what they do best, make U-46 even better via ideas.

# Samreen Khan



*Samreen Khan*

## **Bio**

Town: Bartlett

Age on Election Day: 44

Occupation: Government consultant

Employer: State of Illinois

Previous offices held: None

## **Q&A**

**Q:** Why are you running for this office, whether for reelection or election the first time? Is there a particular issue that motivates you?

**A:** Coming from a family who has valued public education, and a product of public education, I hold this human right our country provides to its highest value.

As the daughter of a professor of biology, who taught in public universities and colleges for over 45 years, I strongly value the opportunity of education for all. I decided to run for the **U-46 school board** after navigating district policies and programs for my child, who had received Early Intervention at home.

As a single mother, I was thrilled to have access to the amazing Pre-K programs for my

son at U-46.

As a board member, I will ensure that our teachers and staff are supported, while being held to the highest standards. I will make the success of our students my number one priority.

I will be an advocate for students and will work to guarantee that they graduate with the skills needed to be successful in life and contributing members of society.

Q: What is the role of the school board in setting and monitoring curriculum?

A: The school board plays a crucial role in setting and monitoring the curriculum. The school board is responsible for setting education policy and guidelines subject to state and federal laws and regulations.

While ISBE's Standard and Instruction Department determines milestones for academic achievement, the Teaching and Learning Department at U-46 is charged with adopting state standards and developing curriculum presenting to the board for approval.

The board has the authority to approve or amend the curriculum that is based on best practices and research driven. To ensure the curriculum is meeting the needs of students and making progress toward academic goals, the board should evaluate progress from reviewing student test scores and other data to determine if the curriculum is meeting the standards.

This being said, it is critical to be inclusive of teacher's voices, experience in the classrooms, and ensuring they are involved in any curriculum development and approval.

Q: Are there curriculum issues within the district that you feel need particular attention from the board?

A: Noting the transition back to classroom learning post-pandemic may have been challenging for students, it is important to find innovative ways to encourage that re-engagement.

The latest School Report Card shows a slight decrease in math and science achievement in the district pre-pandemic vs. post-pandemic. I would like to learn how the board can support staff and teachers in the classrooms to address these overall achievement gaps.

Q: How do you view your role in confronting policy or curriculum controversies: provide leadership even if unpopular, give a voice to constituents — even ones with whom you disagree, or defer to state authorities?

A: In confronting policy or curriculum controversies, it is pertinent to first follow a brief process of elimination to understand jurisdictional capacity. If the policy or curriculum does not lie under Illinois State Board of Education authority and is deferred to regional

school boards to address, it is critical to listen to constituent comments while studying precedence in the matter.

The board is guided to provide leadership, ensuring student safety for any policy or curriculum controversy. It is critical for the board to uphold student success and education to provide a safe platform for constituents to raise questions and concerns.

Moreover, it is critical to build collaborative relationships and partnerships with families and community, business, nonprofit, higher-education, education support organizations, and governmental leaders to influence and expand educational opportunities and experiences to meet the needs of students.

Q: Concerns are growing regarding a new resurgence of the pandemic. If another massive outbreak of infectious disease occurs, what have we learned from the COVID-19 pandemic that will guide your decision making?

A: We have learned to rely on the CDC and the Illinois Department of Public Health to help guide schools in the event of a public health disaster. If jurisdiction is granted to regional school boards and municipalities to manage the situation, it is critical to form a collective decision to mitigate the spread and control future diseases based on best practices and public health guidelines.

Q: Describe your experience working in a group setting to determine policy. What is your style in such a setting to reach agreement and manage school district policy? Explain how you think that will be effective in producing effective actions and decisions of your school board.

A: I have 20 years of experience working in multiple group settings to create and implement policy. When I served as the governor's surrogate in Illinois, I collaborated with a variety of stakeholders including federal, state, and local elected officials, community leaders, and individual constituents.

When leading and coordinating discourse especially as it related to policy, I found it instrumental to remain neutral and provide a safe platform for all voices to be heard.

Encouraging continuous stakeholder engagement and community outreach will be a priority for me on the school board from coordinating focus groups, surveys, and in-person meetings. It has been my experience that the most effective policies are the ones in which the community experiences a direct beneficial impact from and has been a part of in developing.

As for elected officials it is imperative to maintain open lines of communication with the community in order to ensure the best policy decisions.

Q: What makes you the best candidate for the job?

A: My son attends U-46 schools and as a taxpayer in this district, I am greatly invested in

serving on the board in order to preserve and improve the quality of education for our children.

Moreover, from my experience both as a government liaison and subsequently as a private consultant, I understand the importance of building relationships with private and public sector stakeholders. I also understand the importance of ensuring that policy recommendations are data driven and take into account stakeholder concerns.

I have extensive experience working with budgets and program management, and look forward to contributing to a collaborative environment that will yield greater academic excellence for all of our students. I believe the importance of creating collaborative relationships and partnerships to influence and expand educational opportunities and experiences to meet the needs of students in U-46.

Q: What's one good idea you have to better your district that no one is talking about yet?

A: I would like to study academic achievement and graduation rates from all income levels and schools across the district. It is my duty as a board member to ensure that every student is granted the same quality of education and resources across the district, and I will be an advocate for those students and teachers.

Findings should be data driven to understand which schools low-income communities are attending and examine: rate of graduation, test scores, attendance rate, and teacher to student ration in classrooms comparing this data to schools across the district.

If a correlation is present between low-income population and not, I would like to understand what support and services the teachers and students need to experience a comprehensive academic experience. If data suggests there is no correlation of disparity in classrooms/education, it is the responsibility for board members to sit in classrooms to understand challenges in the classroom to support our teachers.

# Heather LH Manzella



***Heather LH Manzella***

## **Bio**

Town: Elgin

Age on Election Day: 52

Occupation: Substitute teacher

Employer: Schaumburg School District 54

Previous offices held: None

## **Q&A**

**Q:** Why are you running for this office, whether for reelection or election the first time? Is there a particular issue that motivates you?

**A:** I'm running because our students are failing, our tax dollars are not being spent efficiently, and I want

to ensure that curriculum is appropriate and focus on improving academic and life skills.

**Q:** What is the role of the school board in setting and monitoring curriculum?

**A:** The school board is the final decision on approving which curriculum is purchased by the district.

Q: Are there curriculum issues within the district that you feel need particular attention from the board?

A: Yes. According to the Illinois State Board of Education's most recent report card, 53 of the 57 schools in U-46 are failing to educate students to proficiency levels in English, math, and science.

Q: How do you view your role in confronting policy or curriculum controversies: provide leadership even if unpopular, give a voice to constituents — even ones with whom you disagree, or defer to state authorities?

A: My role is to actively listen to input from parents, teachers, administration, and the community and bring those concerns and ideas to discussion with other board members. I believe in open communication and exchange of ideas — even when opinions are drastically different.

Q: Concerns are growing regarding a new resurgence of the pandemic. If another massive outbreak of infectious disease occurs, what have we learned from the COVID-19 pandemic that will guide your decision making?

A: We have learned that masks do little, if anything, to lessen the spread of COVID; lockdowns are detrimental to our students socially and academically; and that vaccines without proven long term efficacy have the potential for devastating adverse reactions. If there are new factors which are widely researched and proven by a variety of scientists and epidemiologists, I am willing to take those into consideration.

Q: Describe your experience working in a group setting to determine policy. What is your style in such a setting to reach agreement and manage school district policy? Explain how you think that will be effective in producing effective actions and decisions of your school board.

A: I worked with a committee on PBIS (Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports) to determine how best to introduce and implement the system within our school. I actively listen, offer suggestions, and work with others to reach agreement.

Q: What makes you the best candidate for the job?

A: I'm passionate about student success.

Q: What's one good idea you have to better your district that no one is talking about yet?

A: Smaller class sizes that focus on progression of subject matter based on individual mastery.

# Chanda Schwartz



*Chanda Schwartz*

## **Bio**

Town: Bartlett

Age on Election Day: 46

Occupation: Admissions officer

Employer: Northwestern University

Previous offices held: U-46 Community Advisory Council (CAC) chair, Unite U-46 Community co-chair, Alignment Collaborative for Education (ACE) operating board member, U-46 CAC vice chair, U-46 CAC Specialized Student Services Committee co-chair, DuPage Area Moms board of directors vice president, Mothers & More DuPage Chapter co-chair, and Mothers & More DuPage Chapter secretary

## **Q&A**

Q: Why are you running for this office, whether for reelection or election the first time? Is there a particular issue that motivates you?

A: I am running for school board because I am passionate about serving and giving back to our community. I started serving in the district to stay informed and contribute to moving the district forward.

As a parent with two students who attend U-46 schools, I have learned the ins and outs

of navigating the district and advocating for a student with special needs. I have enjoyed getting to know members of our community, serving alongside parents, community members, and staff.

I want to bring my experience and service in the district to the school board. I value education and I care about supporting the needs of all students. I believe in academic success for all and that when we support our staff, we support our students.

Q: What is the role of the school board in setting and monitoring curriculum?

A: The Curriculum & Instruction department designs curriculum. We also have the **U-46 Instructional Council**, an advisory group who makes recommendations to the superintendent and board of education related to curriculum and other areas.

The school board is guided by board policy in adopting and monitoring curriculum. It is the superintendent of the district who recommends a comprehensive curriculum that is aligned with specific criteria.

The school board's role is to adopt a curriculum, upon recommendation of the superintendent, that satisfies the specified criteria per board policy.

Current curriculum is monitored, reviewed, and reported to the school board through a curriculum review program developed by the superintendent.

Q: Are there curriculum issues within the district that you feel need particular attention from the board?

A: With the advancements of artificial intelligence and the buzz around ChatGPT, there is a shift that will need to happen in our educational system in the near future.

Figuring out what that shift will look like and how to adapt is important. With this technology, the answers to most traditional homework questions are just a few keyboard clicks away.

It will be important to understand how this technology may be leveraged as a potential tool in teaching curriculum and doing so without compromising the originality of student assignments.

Furthermore, we can expand how we teach about the advancements of technology and how students can leverage them.

Q: How do you view your role in confronting policy or curriculum controversies: provide leadership even if unpopular, give a voice to constituents — even ones with whom you disagree, or defer to state authorities?

A: When confronting policy or curriculum controversies, balance is key. I am flexible, thoughtful, and objective in decision making. There should always be space to give a

voice to constituents, even ones with whom I disagree. It is important to understand concerns, as these are necessary conversations to move forward in governance and as a community.

There will be times when leadership, even if unpopular, is needed and there will be times when we will have to address issues at the state level. If there are mandates at the state level, communication on how they may affect our district is important.

Q: Concerns are growing regarding a new resurgence of the pandemic. If another massive outbreak of infectious disease occurs, what have we learned from the COVID-19 pandemic that will guide your decision making?

A: During the pandemic, we learned how to adapt to the constantly changing guidelines and mandates. Our district worked with three county health departments, adhered to state and federal guidelines/mandates to mitigate risk, and continued to educate our students.

They provided equitable access to technology, internet, and food.

Looking back on how we adapted, understanding what worked well, and recognizing areas for improvement will guide my decision-making in how we proceed should another outbreak of infectious disease occur.

We will need to work together to make the best decisions in order to continue educating our students, minimize learning loss, foster mental wellness for students and staff, and adapt as needed.

Q: Describe your experience working in a group setting to determine policy. What is your style in such a setting to reach agreement and manage school district policy? Explain how you think that will be effective in producing effective actions and decisions of your school board.

A: While serving on the executive committee of the U-46 Community Advisory Council (CAC), the committee has had to review our policies and amend bylaws.

During the pandemic, we had to modify our meeting model and consider policy changes. I have also served in other board roles in nonprofit organizations, helping to develop policies. My style is to listen to all views when working to reach an agreement and manage policy.

It is also important to regularly review policies for effectiveness and assess risks to understand how policies will impact our district, staff, and students.

As a school board member, I will be a voice for those who are not in the room and an advocate for the U-46 community when policy decisions are being made. I will listen to understand while collaborating with fellow board members to determine policy and

govern effectively.

Q: What makes you the best candidate for the job?

A: I have lived in the district for 21-plus years. I understand navigating the district as a parent and advocating for students with special needs.

I have served the district in various capacities through community involvement and leadership. I have worked to inform parents, be a voice, promote engagement, and support students and staff. I am committed to continuing this work. I am collaborative, thoughtful, and objective in decision-making.

I have professional experience in software engineering, project management, nonprofit administration, board governance, and university admissions.

I am passionate about serving our district and community to foster the conditions for student success. I believe that I will bring a balanced approach and broad perspective to the school board.

Q: What's one good idea you have to better your district that no one is talking about yet?

A: We lost significant face-to-face interaction through the pandemic. Mass communication through technology doesn't always reach the families whose students may have special education needs.

Reaching out to families who do not know about the specialized student services resources in our district and creating a partnership with families can help to broaden our reach.

This could be in the form of a family partner/liaison who is assigned a group of families in our district to reach out to them personally and ensure that they are aware of the services available to their students.

– Elgin Courier-News –

‘Get out and go’

## Jr Bulls repeat as IHSA wheelchair basketball state champs

March 24, 2023



*Drew Beutel of the Jr Bulls goes to shoot as teammate **Nellie Meinhadt** looks on while screening assistant coach Kylie Winsor in practice on Saturday. Rick Armstrong/Beacon-News*



***The Jr Bulls won the Illinois High School Association’s wheelchair basketball state championship. Picture are, first row from left, Yuriy Khudyk, **Nellie Meinhardt** and Tessa Pate; second row, Matthew Birnbaum, Jeffrey Birnbaum, Jonathan Parris and Drew Beutel; back row, assistant coach Kylie Winsor and coach Curtis Lease. IHSA***

Drew Beutel has mobility issues due to a disability that limits his walking, but that hasn’t stopped him from developing into a pretty good athlete.

A Neuqua Valley sophomore, this kid has wheels — figuratively and literally.

So do his six teammates on the Jr Bulls, a Synergy Adaptive Athletics wheelchair basketball team offered by the Western DuPage Special Recreation Association.

“We try to get out and go,” Beutel said of the team’s strategy. “It helps to be faster and smarter.

“You try to outsmart your opponent, and it’s a big deal setting picks to stop an opponent’s chair and free up a teammate.”

The Jr Bulls swept all four opponents March 11 in Champaign to win the Illinois High School Association’s wheelchair basketball state championship for the second straight year.

The decisive win in the round-robin event was a 56-42 decision against a Lincoln-Way area team that took the Jr Bulls to two overtimes the previous year. That followed lopsided wins over teams from Peoria, Chicago and the northern suburbs.

The physical action is not for the faint of heart, with each game played on a full-size court featuring two 20-minute halves.

This was the 12th time in the 20-year history of the event the Jr Bulls have won.

Beutel is the team's point guard this season, his second since coming up to the varsity after beginning the sport at age 5.

Beutel developed transverse myelitis, inflammation of the spinal cord, shortly after receiving his 15-month immunization shot. For a number of months he was totally paralyzed, according to his father John. "He has better use of his legs and can ambulate a little bit with crutches and braces," John Beutel said. "From the waist up, he's 100 percent — even more so. Because of his lower disability his upper body is very strong."

Curtis Lease, a four-time All-American in the sport at Illinois from 1990-94 who played on three U.S. national teams, joined Jr Bulls as an assistant coach in 2001 when he moved to the area.

A one-leg amputee since a lawn mower accident at age 2, Lease has been the head coach since 2018, when he scaled back his own playing career.

Two high school freshmen on the team are center Jonathan Parris, an Elburn resident who attends Kaneland, and **South Elgin's Nellie Meinhardt**. Both have spina bifida.

**Meinhardt**, who walks with crutches, started playing at age 6. She also enjoys weight lifting.

"I'm strong in ball-handling and I love the sport," she said. "Mostly because of all the people I've met and friendships I've developed on my team and with opposing players I've met."

Parris, who can walk short distances, likes the physicality. He would like to try sled hockey next.

The team also includes senior twins Jeffrey and Matthew Birnbaum, of Clarendon Hills; Yuriy Khudyk, of Mount Prospect; and Tessa Pate, a middle-school student from Lombard.

"Drew (Beutel) and Jeffrey (Birnbaum) have been our leading scorers most of the year," Lease said. "Jonathan (Parris) has picked up his defense, and everybody's court awareness has gotten much better.

"I try to prepare them for success, both on and off the court."

Lease said he doesn't take it easy on them either.

"I didn't play until college and didn't even think I needed a wheelchair since I grew up

with a prosthetic leg,” he said. “I was coached as an athlete. It wasn’t, ‘Hey, here’s the heart and hustle award.’

“I got what-for if I wasn’t doing something right.”

His players seem to share that attitude.

The team held a fundraiser this year, bringing extra chairs and taking on Timothy Christian’s basketball team in a wheelchair game.

“We spotted them 20 points and were up by 20 at halftime,” Lease said. “You learn to appreciate the skill level.”

John Beutel does that with his son, spending a lot of time at Jr Bulls practices in his own chair, working with the team.

The family learned of the sport by attending a disability day sponsored by Chicago’s NBA team when Drew was 4.

“They had some empty chairs,” John Beutel said. “Drew sits down and starts pushing it around. The rest is history. I can’t keep him out of a chair.

“It’s amazing how these kids are able to control their muscles just to play the sport. I enjoy getting in there and trying to understand what they’re doing, what the tricks are to stop an opponent.”

It’s just like a travel sport, pointed out John Beutel, who took his son to Wisconsin-Whitewater last weekend to catch the action in the NCAA Wheelchair Tournament.

“It was amazing to see some of the kids he’s played against at some point playing at that level,” John said. “The skill set is unbelievable. The game is so fast and really exciting.”

He has asked his son just one thing.

“I don’t care where he goes to college,” John said. “Just keep that smile he always has every time he gets out on that court.

“I hope he keeps it, however long he continues to play basketball.”

**– Elgin Courier-News –**

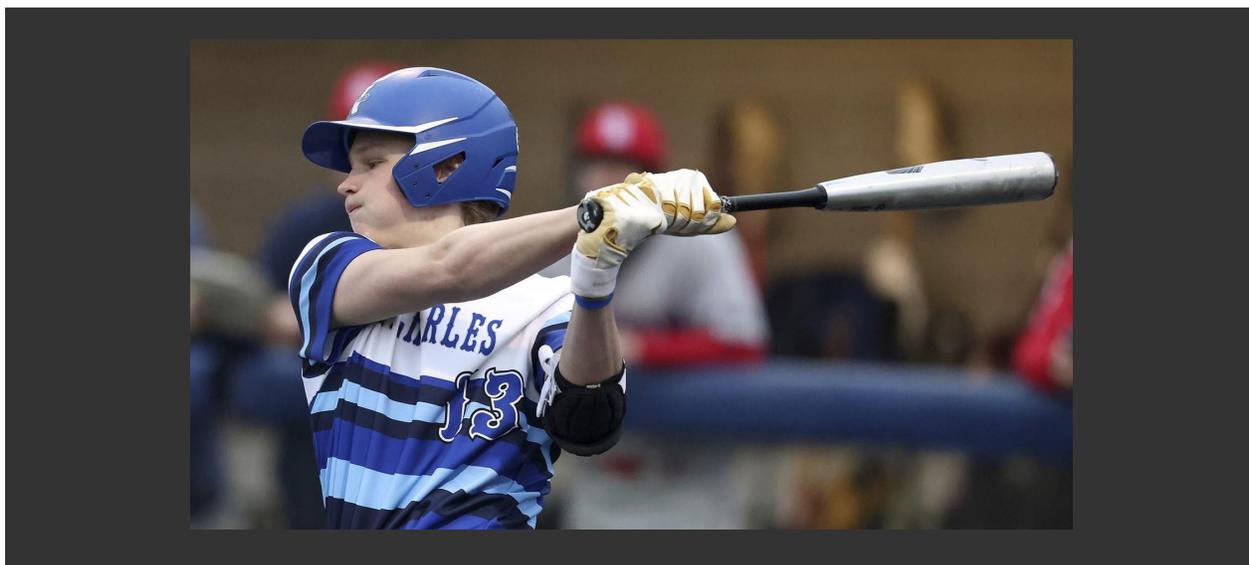
**Slam dunk for Stars**

**St. Charles North junior Reinke, who calls basketball his first love, homers, has 5 RBIs**

## against South Elgin

March 24, 2023

By Paul Johnson for Beacon-News



St. Charles North's Parker Reinke connects against **South Elgin** during Wednesday's game at Judson's Hoffer Field. H. Rick Bamman/Beacon-News

Regardless of how things go this spring, St. Charles North's Parker Reinke realizes that he has some big decisions to make after the baseball season.

The junior outfielder is coming off a successful showing in basketball, but he has achieved quite a bit of notoriety around the Illinois baseball circles.

"We'll see," said Reinke, who was all-conference in baseball as a sophomore. "Basketball was my first love for sure, but I'm starting to get more of a bigger love for baseball.

"They're pretty equal right now — I'm not going to lie."

Performances like the one Reinke put together Wednesday may continue to swing the pendulum of his future college sport in a certain direction.

Reinke produced a two-run double and a three-run homer as the North Stars earned an 8-2 non conference victory in six innings over **South Elgin** at Judson's Hoffer Field in Elgin.

Colin Ryder went 2-for-3 for St. Charles North (1-1), while Jaden Harmon and Jackson Spring each scored a pair of runs.

Quinn Bradford singled in pinch-runner Logan Bialek for one of the runs for South Elgin (0-1). Jordan Green scored the other run on an error.

Reinke's homer, meanwhile, went to straightaway left field in a five-run fifth inning.

"I was kind of hunting for a fastball because he had just thrown me a fastball and I missed it, so I thought he was going to throw me another one," Reinke said. "He threw me one knee high, and I took advantage of it."

Reinke lifted the ball into the fog and mist and over the fence, scoring both Harmon and Spring.

"I had no clue that was going out," Reinke said. "I thought it was a pop fly." The breakout was good to see for St. Charles North coach Todd Genke, who is pinning a ton of the team's offensive hopes this season on Reinke.

"He's going to be right in the middle of everything we do," Genke said. "He's a very electric athlete, multisport athlete, and that's what we expect out of him."

"I think if he's willing to be coached and understands what it takes to succeed, the sky is the limit for him. I was excited to see him get going a little bit."

After the North Stars were no-hit Tuesday by Marmion, Reinke was happy to see Wednesday's turnaround. They had nine hits.

"The coaches sat us down and told us to reset, put that game behind us," Reinke said. "We took an hour of hitting before this game, just to get our head straight into what we have to do, and it really paid off."

"It set the tone for the area like, 'We're legit.'"

After falling behind 3-0, South Elgin made it interesting with runs in the fourth and fifth innings.

St. Charles North, however, broke the game open with the five runs in the fifth. The game was called due to weather conditions after six innings.

"I was very happy with the energy and what they brought," South Elgin coach Jim Kating said. "I think we scrapped. For our first game, we took the training wheels off a little bit."

"I was very happy with the kids. We have stuff to clean up and the kids know that. They know that some of the mistakes cost us a little bit."

Reinke leads a strong junior class for St. Charles North, a team that was dominated by

seniors last season. He welcomes that challenge.

“I look to be a leader, but it’s all based on all of us and how well we work together,” Reinke said. “We’re all great friends. We all work together really well, on the field and off the field.

“Last year, we got eliminated in the first round of the playoffs. This year, I’m trying to get our team going far and try to steamroll through it.”

Paul Johnson is a freelance reporter.

## – Elgin Courier-News –

### LOCAL SCOREBOARD

#### WEDNESDAY’S RESULTS

#### HIGH SCHOOLS

#### BASEBALL

Antioch 3, Prairie Ridge 1 (5 innings)

Aurora Christian 11, Serena 0

Aurora Christian (2-0): Drew Hernandez 3 RBIs.

De La Salle 10, Washington 9

De La Salle (1-2): Angelo Chavarria 3-for-4, HR, 3 RBIs.

Elgin Academy 12, Momence 6

Evergreen Park 17, Kennedy 0

Evergreen (3-0): Alex Munoz 3-for-4, 5 RBIs.

Harvest Christian 29, Hinckley-Big Rock 1 (4 innings)

Highland Park 4, Grayslake North 1

Highland Park (2-0): Dylan Lew run, 2 RBIs.

Joliet Catholic 2, Brother Rice 1

Kaneland 8, Wheaton Academy 6

Kaneland (1-1): Johnny Spallasso 3-for-3, double, 2 runs, 2 RBIs.

Kenwood 4, Oak Forest 0 (3 innings)

Lake Zurich 4, Barrington 0

Lake Zurich (2-0): Ryan Kondrad 3-for-4, double, 2 RBIs.

Libertyville 7, Oak Park-River Forest 5 (5 innings)

Lincoln-Way East 11, Wilmington 2

Marist 12, Stagg 1 (5 innings)

Marist (2-1): Owen Duffy 2-for-3, triple, HR, 2 runs, 4 RBIs.

Mundelein 12, Buffalo Grove 2 (5 innings)

Mundelein (1-0): Michael Farina double, 2 runs, RBI.

Morgan Park 6, Ag. Science 3

Naperville North 7, Bolingbrook 7 (6 innings)

Nazareth 11, Reavis 5

Oak Lawn 8, Crete-Monee 3

Oswego 5, Marmion 2 (6 innings)

Oswego East 13, Waubonsie Valley 9 (6 innings)

Oswego East (1-1): Mike Polubinski 3-for-4, double, triple, 2 runs, 2 RBIs.

Palatine 7, Vernon Hills 1

Prospect 5, Jacobs 2

St. Charles North 8, South Elgin 2

St. Rita 12, Marian Catholic 6 (5 innings)

St. Rita (2-1): Ryder Johnson 2-for-2, double, 2 runs, 3 RBIs.

Simeon 3, Mount Carmel 2 (8 innings)

Mount Carmel (1-1): James Nydegger 2 RBIs.

Stevenson 6, Glenbrook South 2

Stevenson (1-0): Joe Dolenga double, run, RBI.

**Streamwood** 7, Leyden 2

T.F. South 9, Bloom 8 (5 innings)

T.F. South (2-1): Tyler Earsmuth double, 2 runs, 2 RBIs.

Willowbrook 5, **Bartlett** 2

## **TUESDAY'S RESULTS**

### **HIGH SCHOOLS**

#### **BASEBALL**

Ag. Science 13, T.F. North 7

Antioch 6, Crystal Lake Central 4 (6 innings)

Aurora Christian 10, Marian Central Catholic 0 (5 inning)

Aurora Christian (1-0): Conner Kendall CG, NH, 8 Ks. Drew Hernandez 2-for-4, 2 runs, 2 RBIs.

Bloom 10, Argo 4

Bloom (1-2): Eliasar Rosales 2-for-4, double, run, 4 RBIs.

Carmel 12, Dundee-Crown 1 (5 innings)

Carmel (1-1): Rhett Wolf 2-for-2, HR, 2 runs, 5 RBIs.

Chicago Christian 11, Beecher 1 (5 innings)

Chicago Christian (2-0): Josh Sedakis 2-for-3, 2 doubles, run, 2 RBIs.

Genoa-Kingston 6, Plano 5

Genoa-Kingston (1-0): Ethan Wilnau 2-for-4, 3 runs, RBI.

Hampshire 16, **Elgin** 3 (5 innings)

Hampshire (1-1): Dominic Borecky 2-for-3, double, HR, 2 runs, 2 RBIs.

Harvest Christian 5, Kaneland 2

Highland Park 7, Lincoln Park 5 (5 innings)

Highland Park (1-0): David Finfer triple, run, RBI.

Homewood-Flossmoor 16, Oswego East 6 (6 innings)

H-F (4-0): Demir Heidelberg 3-for-5, HR, 3 runs, 5 RBIs.

Jacobs 9, Hersey 7 (5 innings)

Jacobs (2-0): Nick Gottfried HR, 2 runs, 2 RBIs.

Lake Forest 4, Vernon Hills 3

Lake Zurich 8, Prospect 2

Lake Zurich (1-0): Ryan Kondrad 2-for-3, 2 doubles, run, 4 RBIs.

Lemont 10, Evergreen Park 0 (5 innings)

Lemont (1-1, 1-0 SSC Blue): Brandon Johnson 4 IP, H; 2-for-2, 2 RBIs, 2 SBs.

Lincoln-Way East 15, Simeon 8

Lincoln-Way East (2-0): Tyler Bell 2 HRs; grand slam.

Lincoln-Way West 3, Yorkville 1

Lincoln-Way West (1-0): Conor Essenburg (W) 6.1 IP, H, 13 Ks: 3-for-3, RBI.

Marian Catholic 5, Stagg 4

Marian (1-0): Kevin Denty double, 2 RBIs.

Marmion 2, St. Charles North 0

Marmion (2-0): Zach Bostrand, Ethan Flores combined NH. Luke O'Connor 2 RBIs.

Naperville Central 6, Batavia 5 (6 innings)

Naperville Central (1-1): Gabe Dickerson double, 2 RBIs.

Neuqua Valley 4, Hinsdale Central 2 (6 innings)

Neuqua (1-0): Matthew Knapczyk 2-for-3, 2 runs.

Oswego 6, Benet 2

Oswego (2-2): Ben Hernandez 2-for-2, 2 RBIs.

St. Laurence 11, Maine South 1

St. Laurence (2-0): Jameson Martin 2-run HR.

St. Rita 13, Oak Lawn 2 (5 innings)

St. Rita (1-1): Sir Jamison Jones 3-for-3, double, HR, run, 5 RBIs. Tommy Atkinson double, 4 runs, RBI.

Sandburg 4, Brother Rice 3

Sandburg (3-0): Nick Zimmerman double, RBI.

Sandwich 9, Rock Falls 3

Sandwich (1-0): Austin Marks 2-for-3, 4 runs.

Shepard 17, Hinsdale South 9 (5 innings)

Shepard (1-0): Ethan Byrne 2-for-3, double, HR, 2 runs, 3 RBIs.

Stillman Valley 14, Hinckley-Big Rock 4 (6 innings)

Hinckley-Big Rock (0-1): Martin Ledbetter 2-for-4, double, 2 runs, RBI.

T.F. South 10, Peotone 0 (6 innings)

T.F. South (1-1): Tyler Earsmuth 2-for-3, triple, 2 runs, RBI.

Tinley Park 12, Thornwood 7

Tinley (2-0): Zach Hesse 2-for-3, double, 2 runs, 3 RBIs.

Waubonsie Valley 6, Plainfield East 2 (6 innings)

Waubonsie (2-0): Blake Pietryk double, 2 runs, 2 RBIs.

## **DEKALB BARB FEST CUP**

Yorkville 3, Rockford Guilford 1

Plainfield East 7, Larkin 0

## **ST. CHARLES ROSE AUGSBURG-DRACH INVITATIONAL**

St. Charles East 2, Bartlett 1

St. Charles East (3-0): Mia Rashke goal, assist.

St. Charles North 4, Nazareth 0

St. Charles North (2-1): Bella Najera 2 goals.

Loyola 1, Burlington Central 0

## **BOYS VOLLEYBALL**

Argo d. Crete-Monee 26-24, 23-25, 26-24

Carmel d. Lake Forest 25-7, 29-27

Carmel (1-0): Michael Schofield 8 kills.

Chicago Christian d. Bremen 19-25, 25-21, 27-25

Elgin d. St. Edward 25-22, 24-26, 25-21

Joliet Catholic d. Lockport 25-16, 25-17

Lockport (0-1): Josh Bluhm 6 kills.

Joliet West d. Lemont 25-21, 25-18

Lake Zurich d. Grayslake Central 25-21, 25-23

Lake Zurich (2-0): Gabe Schwartz 8 kills.

Lincoln-Way East d. Minooka 25-15, 25-19

Lincoln-Way East (1-0): Tyler Walenga 8 kills. Matt Muehlnickel 6 kills, 5 digs.

Lyons d. Brother Rice 22-25, 25-23, 25-22

Marian Catholic d. Shepard 29-27, 25-19

Marian (1-0): Joe Staack 9 kills.

Marist d. Sandburg 25-10, 25-18

Marist (1-0): Alex Smith 5 kills.

Metea Valley d. St. Charles East 25-19, 27-25

Metea (1-0): Bartosz Chmielewski 9 kills.

Oak Lawn d. Stagg 25-19, 22-25, 25-22

Romeoville d. Providence 25-22, 25-23

St. Laurence d. Reavis 24-26, 27-25, 26-24

Vernon Hills d. Lakes 25-19, 25-20

Vernon Hills (1-0): Noah Ellis 7 kills, 7 digs.

Waukegan d. Fenton 25-12, 25-13

*Compiled by Josh Krockey.*

To read the full article, click [here](#).