FREEPOD 11-12-26

Illinois has released its latest school report cards, revealing some striking differences across northwest Illinois. We'll look at which schools earned top marks and which are facing challenges.

Freeport School District faces a multimillion-dollar budget deficit and a credit rating downgrade, while Carroll County voters reject a proposed school construction referendum.

Plus, a historic Freeport mansion could get a new lease on life, and local organizations are stepping up to help families this holiday season.

We'll also preview upcoming community events, including Freeport's annual Mistletoe Walk.

Those stories and more are coming up on Freepod—

The news you've been missing!

ILLINOIS SCHOOL REPORT CARDS REVEAL MIXED RESULTS ACROSS NORTHWEST ILLINOIS

Illinois' latest school report cards show significant differences in academic performance across northwest Illinois, with some schools earning the state's highest designation while others face substantial challenges.

The new ratings range from Exemplary to Comprehensive.

Jo Daviess County posted particularly strong results, with 13 of its 16 schools receiving Exemplary designations. Schools in Galena, Stockton, and River Ridge were among the highest rated.

In Ogle County, all three Byron schools earned Exemplary ratings, while Tilton Elementary in Rochelle received a Developing designation.

Carroll County saw Exemplary ratings for Chadwick-Milledgeville Elementary and Eastland Elementary.

Stephenson County had more mixed results.

Lena-Winslow Elementary and High School, along with Pearl City Elementary and High School, received Exemplary ratings.

However, Freeport Middle School and Jones-Farrar received Comprehensive designations, the state's lowest category. Freeport High School and Empire Elementary were rated Developing, as was Pearl City Junior High.

The report cards consider academic achievement, student growth, graduation rates, and other measures. State officials say the ratings help identify schools needing additional support.

FREEPORT SCHOOL DISTRICT FACES BUDGET CRISIS AND CREDIT DOWNGRADE

And while those report cards measure academic performance, another challenge facing schools is how to pay for education.

Freeport School District 145 is facing a projected $7.6 million operating deficit, despite reportedly cutting more than $6 million in spending.

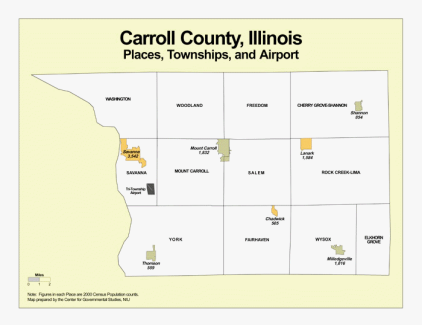
On November 4, S&P Global Ratings lowered the district's bond rating two notches, from A− to BBB, citing weaker-than-expected financial results and declining cash reserves.

The agency also assigned a negative outlook, warning that another downgrade could follow if deficits continue.

S&P estimates a 1-in-3 chance the district will fail to achieve balanced operations by fiscal year 2028.

The district held its tax levy hearing November 4 as officials consider additional spending reductions or revenue increases to stabilize finances.

CARROLL COUNTY VOTERS REJECT SCHOOL BOND REFERENDUM



School funding was also on the ballot in Carroll County, where voters overwhelmingly rejected a $12.37 million bond referendum for the Chadwick-Milledgeville School District.

Unofficial results show 845 votes against the proposal and 327 in favor, a margin of 72 to 28 percent.

Turnout across the six participating Carroll County precincts reached 68 percent.

The proposal would have funded a secured school entrance, new gymnasium, expanded early childhood education space, and additional career and technical education facilities.

The defeat leaves district officials considering how to address those needs without the proposed bond funding. No alternative financing plan has been announced.

HCC HOSTING EXPRESS REGISTRATION EVENTS

Turning to higher education, Highland Community College is helping students prepare for the spring semester with upcoming Express Registration events.

Students can register for classes, take placement tests, and meet with an advisor, all in one visit.

Sessions are scheduled for November 19, November 30 through December 4, and January 4 through sixth.

All sessions run from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. in the Student Center, Building H, on Highland's Freeport campus.

More information is available at highland.edu.

COMPOST YOUR PUMPKINS AT FREEPORT STUDENT GARDEN



And there's a different kind of learning happening outside the classroom in Freeport, where a student garden is giving Halloween pumpkins a new purpose.

Throughout November, residents can donate pumpkins to a composting project near Freeport Middle School.

The collection site is beside the large shipping crate and chicken coops on the west side of the soccer parking lot, where wheelbarrows are available.

Residents should remove candles, stickers, and decorations. Painted pumpkins cannot be accepted.

The compost will turn discarded pumpkins into nutrient-rich material for soil and gardens.

HISTORIC RAWLEIGH MANSION IN FREEPORT SET FOR REDEVELOPMENT



Giving something old a new purpose is also the goal behind plans for one of Freeport's historic properties.

The former Rawleigh Mansion, at 836 West Stephenson Street, was recently purchased by Stone Rose Partners.

In October, the Freeport City Council approved a redevelopment agreement intended to relieve a substantial portion of municipal liens inherited from previous owners.

City officials say the agreement will help address a longstanding nuisance property while preserving neighborhood character.

The developers plan to restore the mansion into a safe, single-family residence and have released conceptual images of the proposed renovation.

LOCAL AUTHOR TO READ FROM NEW MEMOIR

Preserving the past isn't just about buildings. Sometimes it's about preserving the stories of people who lived here.

Local author Peter Shianna will read from his new memoir, You're Doing What?, Wednesday, November 18, at the Freeport Public Library.

The book features 98 short chapters covering his early entrepreneurial adventures in tiny Red Oak, Illinois, his college years, and his sometimes unpredictable career.

The reading takes place from 1·2:30 p.m. in the library's meeting room.

SENIOR RESOURCE CENTER OFFERS HANDS-ON ELECTRICITY CLASS

And for those interested in learning something new, the Senior Resource Center in Freeport is offering a hands-on science class.

Energy: Circuits and Switches takes place Monday, November 16, from 1·2:30 p.m.

Participants will build basic electrical circuits, design switches, and experiment with different light bulbs.

The class is taught by science educator Corinne Sosso and sponsored by Adkins Energy.

The cost is $5 per person. To register, call 815-235-9777.

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS HOSTS HEALTHCARE REFORM DISCUSSION

From the science of electricity to the complexities of healthcare, another community program will examine an issue affecting nearly everyone.

The League of Women Voters is hosting a discussion about healthcare reform and the possibility of a single-payer system.

The free program takes place Tuesday, November 17, at 6:30 in the evening at the Freeport Public Library.

Panelists include Rockford physician Doctor John Maynard, Freeport physician Doctor Barry Barnes, retired nurse Jody Coss, and Ed Klein, co-founder of Health Over Profit for Everyone.

The panel will examine healthcare costs, access to medical services, and reform proposals, followed by audience questions.

The event is free and open to the public.

FOUNDATION FOR NORTHWEST ILLINOIS HOSTS COMMUNITY HAPPY HOUR

Community conversations can also happen in more informal settings.

The Foundation for Northwest Illinois is hosting a public happy hour Friday, November 13, beginning at 5 p.m. at Mousie's Lounge inside the Freeport Club.

Guests can meet neighbors and community leaders while learning how the Foundation supports local nonprofits, charitable grants, and regional development.

The event takes place at 1614 South Park Boulevard in Freeport.

There's no admission fee or formal agenda, and everyone is welcome.

PRESENTATION ON INDIGENOUS SPIRITUALITY AT HCC



Another opportunity to explore different perspectives is coming to Highland Community College.

Award-winning Ojibwa author and speaker Kimberly Sigafus will visit Highland Tuesday, November 17, to present a program on Indigenous spirituality.

Sigafus will share insights into Native American culture, traditions, and beliefs.

Attendees can also sample her turkey and wild rice soup and purchase copies of her books.

The event is free and open to the public.

VOICES ADOPT-A-FAMILY PROGRAM

As the holidays approach, local organizations are reminding us of the importance of helping neighbors facing difficult circumstances.

VOICES of Stephenson County is seeking sponsors for its annual Adopt-A-Family program, supporting survivors of domestic and sexual violence and their families.

Individuals, businesses, and groups can sponsor families by purchasing and wrapping Christmas gifts.

VOICES also operates a Holiday Store where survivors can select donated gifts for loved ones.

To sponsor a family, contact Dee, Amanda, or Donna at 815-235-9421, or email dalthoff@voicesofsc.org.

JCE CO-OP ANNOUNCES FALL INTO GIVING FOOD DRIVE

And that spirit of giving extends beyond holiday presents.

Jo-Carroll Energy is collecting nonperishable food items through December 31 as part of its annual Fall Into Giving Food Drive.

Donations will help stock local food pantries and support families facing food insecurity throughout northwest Illinois.

Contributions of any size are welcome and can be dropped off at JCE Co-op offices during regular business hours.

A list of participating food pantries is available at jcecoop.com under Fall Giving Season.

LIONS HOSTING TOY DRIVE IN OUR AREA

Local Lions Clubs are also working to brighten the holidays for children in need.

District 1D Lions are partnering with the Salvation Army for a toy drive Saturday, November 21, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. at J.H. Barkau and Son's Used Car Sales, 1102 South Street in Freeport.

Families can also bring children for pictures with Santa Claus, Mrs. Claus, and the Grinch from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Organizers encourage residents to donate toys to help local children celebrate the holidays.

For information, call Lion Tim Svihlik at 815-650-3225.

FREEPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY HOSTS HOLIDAY GIFT SALE

And if you're looking for unique holiday gifts, the Freeport Historical Society is hosting its annual sale November 20 through the twenty-second.

Shoppers will find handmade items from local artists, books about local history, pretzel-themed ornaments and jewelry, small antiques, and traditional Rawleigh products.

The sale takes place at the historic museum, 1440 South Carroll Avenue in Freeport.

Hours are 9 a.m.–5 p.m. Friday, 9 a.m.–4 p.m. Saturday, and 11 a.m.–3 p.m. Sunday.

Admission is free.

FREEPORT'S ANNUAL MISTLETOE WALK KICKS OFF HOLIDAY SEASON

And the holiday shopping continues downtown, where Freeport's annual Mistletoe Walk returns Saturday, November 21, from 12·5 p.m.



The celebration features horse-drawn carriage rides, photos with Santa and Mrs. Claus, and live reindeer.

Families can enjoy free s'mores at Karcher Pocket Park, write letters to Santa, and warm up with hot cocoa and cider.

Downtown storefronts will feature festive Living Windows displays from 3:30 until 4:30 p.m..

The celebration concludes at 5 p.m. with Freeport's annual Christmas tree lighting ceremony at the Stephenson County Courthouse.

Organizers encourage visitors to shop locally, enjoy downtown restaurants, and celebrate the start of the holiday season.

More information is available through the Greater Freeport Partnership.

In Closing

With so many opportunities to celebrate, give back, and connect with our neighbors, the holiday season is getting underway across northwest Illinois. And that brings us to the end of this week's Freepod.

Remember, every story from today's newscast is available in written form at freepod.org. You can catch up on the headlines, revisit a story, or share local news with friends and neighbors.

And Freepod is always available on your schedule. New episodes are released every Thursday at 12 p.m., but you can listen anytime, wherever you get your podcasts.

Our thanks to our community liaisons and reporters, our partners at WNIJ in DeKalb, and the Media Studies Department at Highland Community College for producing this program.

Independent local journalism depends on community support. You can help by following Freepod on Facebook, subscribing to the podcast, and sharing our stories.

You can also make a tax-deductible contribution at freepod.org. Every donation helps keep local news accessible and supports our coverage of northwest Illinois.

We'll be back next Thursday at 12 p.m. with more news from Jo Daviess, Carroll, Ogle, and Stephenson counties.

Until then, stay informed, stay connected, and thanks for listening.

This has been Freepod—

The news you've been missing!