

Chicago Tribune



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BREAKING NEWS AT CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM

‘I believe in these stories’

Area teens become published authors by taking big risks

By **Peter Breen**
Chicago Tribune

Five long months into the pandemic, Aiden Branss found himself wide awake in the middle of the night, meditating on the world’s battered state and sucking down coffee.

The 16-year-old grabbed his laptop, and began to write. And after Branss’ midnight oil burned away, he was left with the beginning of his first novel.

What began as a high energy offshoot of Branss’ isolation has since turned into a small literary enterprise. He inspired six of his friends to write books of their own, and in 2022, Branss founded a company to publish his friends’ books. To date, the company, Aiden Branss Books, has sold thousands of books and provides Branss, now 20, up to \$500 a month.

“I believe in these stories and I believe in these authors, and I do want to expand the company,” said Branss, who’s pursuing an associate degree at Harper College in Palatine while running the company. “I want to get an office one day. I would like to maybe open a store.”

Branss’ self-published debut novel, “2020! From A Teenagers POV,” reads like a cross between a text message and a diary. Branss, who was a sophomore at Palatine High School when the pandemic shuttered schools across the U.S., called the book a heavily fictionalized account of his 2020 experience.

“It was unfiltered and it was crude, and you could even say rude to an extent, but I just tried to keep it real with how teenagers were responding at the time,” he said.

Allie Gillies, an author who has self-published three books and the mother of children who attended Palatine High School at the same time as Branss, said she originally got to know Branss through Palatine-based Township High School District 211 meetings. Gillies, 52, said she became

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HURRICANE HELENE

Deadly storm slams South

‘Catastrophic’ path of destruction leaves at least 40 dead in four states, nearly 4M without power

By **Stephen Smith, Heather Hollingsworth and Kate Payne**
Associated Press

CRAWFORDVILLE, Fla. — Hurricane Helene left an enormous path of destruction across Florida and the Southeast

on Friday, killing at least 40 people in four states, snapping towering oaks like twigs, tearing apart homes and sending rescue crews on desperate missions to save people from floodwaters.

The Category 4 hurricane knocked out power to some hospitals in southern Georgia, and Gov.

Brian Kemp said authorities had to use chain saws to clear debris and open up roads. The storm had maximum sustained winds of 140 mph when it made landfall late Thursday in a sparsely populated region in Florida’s rural Big Bend area, home to fishing villages and vacation hideaways where Florida’s Panhandle and peninsula meet.

Moody’s Analytics said Friday it expects \$15 billion to \$26 billion in

property damage.

Nearly 4 million homes and businesses were without power Friday afternoon in Florida, Georgia and South Carolina, according to poweroutage.us, which tracks utility reports.

In Georgia, an electrical utility group warned of “catastrophic” damage to the state’s utility infrastructure, with more than 100

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ANTONIO PEREZ/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

WEATHERING WAVES

A person gets hits by crashing waves from Lake Michigan on the bike and pedestrian path at 1100 N. DuSable Lake Shore Drive on Friday. Hurricane Helene, the powerful storm that crashed into Florida late Thursday as a Category 4 hurricane, delivered strong winds to the Chicago area. The National Weather Service issued a beach hazard statement and a wind advisory for the region. Rain from the remnants of the storm is forecast for the weekend before skies clear during the early part of next week.

UPCOMING FORECAST

Saturday	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday
High 72 Low 64	High 72 Low 64	High 76 Low 63	High 72 Low 48

Complete Chicagoland forecast on Page 8

CPS halts closures until '27

Moratorium comes as enrollment increases

By **Ikram Mohamed and Sylvan Lebrun**
Chicago Tribune

Chicago Public Schools Chief Pedro Martinez managed to hang on to his job and keep detractors at bay — at least for now — as the Board of Education voted unanimously Thursday in favor of his plan to halt school closures until 2027.

Less than 24 hours later, the district posted an online newsletter pointing out that CPS enrollment was up by 3,000 students — about 1% — to 324,311 students in the first 15 days of the school year.

The reprieve comes during an increasingly fractious period in which Martinez faced accusations of clandestinely plotting to close schools. His role as the district’s chief was constantly in



Chicago Public Schools CEO Pedro Martinez listens during the public comment portion of a board meeting at Roberto Clemente Community Academy in Chicago on Thursday. **CHRIS SWEDA/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

question, as sources told media outlets that Mayor Brandon Johnson asked him to step down.

During his remarks Thursday evening, Martinez addressed the “misinformation campaign” he claimed was waged against him regarding school closures, reiterating that the district has no plans to close schools. He also discussed his role in authoring a resolution extending a moratorium on school closures until 2027.

“There is simply no truth to this,” Martinez said. “To put this issue to rest once and for all, I’m asking the board to adopt the

resolution today — CPS will not close or consolidate any schools before the fully elected school board is in place in January 2027.”

Martinez, however, did not address speculation that he would soon be ousted.

At Thursday’s meeting’s opening, Board of Education President Jianan Shi also insisted there was no plan to close schools, directly addressing the “noise in the media” about CPS and the board.

Earlier in the week, in a post on X, Shi denied signing off on the statement CPS initially issued on

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Final Sox home game was like ‘disaster porn’



Christopher Borrelli

In the closing minutes of the last home game for the 2024 Chicago White Sox, one could feel the Earth’s rotation grind to a halt.

It was as if Guaranteed Rate Field itself let out an exhausted, terminating sigh of relief. Even the fireworks that marked the end felt rushed, brief and eager to be done with. The hurt was past. The horror — at least here on 35th Street (there were still three games left to play in Detroit) — was over. A lone gull looped high above right field, averted its eyes and flew off. The sky was cloudless and the flat metal top of a vendor’s grill, already scrubbed and cold, chimed with the clumsy clang of dropped tongs. Individual

sounds leaped out.

“Let’s go White Sox,” a fan in the left field stands cried, hoping for one farewell chant.

He was met with a single, sarcastic clap, several rows over.

If, by chance, anyone had come to root for the Los Angeles Angels, they left. Indeed, within 10 minutes of the last out, only a handful of pensive White Sox fans remained.

It was an odd wake, full of melancholy, contradiction, elation.

Sort of like leaving the DMV.

The day’s score was White Sox 7, Angels 0. And yet, that season record ...

Wins: 39. Losses: 120.

Fan Appreciation Week — no, seriously — was done, and as you surely know by now, it did not end with the White Sox crowned the worst baseball team since 1900. Loss number 121 — one more loss than the 1962 New York Mets — would

Turn to Sox, Page 4

They didn’t come as much this year, but felt they needed to be there now. A funeral is sad, but an unattended one looks unbearable.

More Israeli strikes in Beirut

Israel said it struck Hezbollah’s headquarters in Beirut on Friday in a series of massive explosions that leveled a populated area. **Nation & World**

Inflation eases once again

A scant increase in prices last month is the latest sign pressures are easing, and it’s expected to trigger another round of rate cuts. **Business**

\$4.00 city and suburbs and elsewhere
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