

**The Illinois Theatre Association's
2026 Illinois High School Theatre Festival**

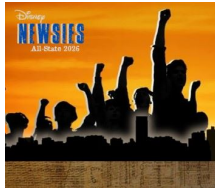


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PRESS RELEASE

**50th Annual Illinois High School Theatre Festival: *Honoring our Past; Celebrating our Future*
Announces 2026 All-State Company of Disney's *Newsies***



The 2026 Illinois High School Theatre Festival (IHSTF), the largest and oldest non-competitive high school theatre festival in the nation, is proud to present Disney's *Newsies* as its 2026 All-State production. *Newsies* will be presented through arrangement with Musical Theatre International (MTI) and highlights a select ensemble of the top high school actors, technicians, and musicians from throughout the state of Illinois.

Disney's *Newsies*, based on the 1992 motion picture, features a score by eight-time Academy Award® winner Alan Menken and Jack Feldman and a book by four-time Tony Award® winner Harvey Fierstein.

Newsies is inspired by the real-life Newsboy Strike of 1899, when newsboy Kid Blink led a band of orphan and runaway “newsies” on a two-week-long action against Pulitzer, Hearst, and other powerful newspaper publishers. Timely and fresh, the fictionalized adaptation of *Newsies* addresses age-old themes of social injustice, exploitative labor practices, and David-versus-Goliath struggles as the young learn to harness their power against a corrupt establishment. High-energy with non-stop thrills, the stage version introduces eight brand-new songs by the original team of Menken and Feldman while keeping many of the beloved songs from the film, including “Carrying the Banner,” “Seize the Day,” “King of New York,” and “Santa Fe.”

The All-State cast, crew, and pit orchestra are comprised of top student performers, musicians, and technicians from Illinois. Five hundred eighteen talented students auditioned and interviewed to be a part of *Newsies*. One hundred and twenty-three were selected for the final production company.

All-State Director Anna McSweeney (Addison Trail High School) states, “The 2026 Illinois High School Theatre Festival All-State production of *Newsies* powerfully embodies the Festival theme: ‘Honoring our Past; Celebrating our Future.’ *Newsies* illuminates the forgotten struggles of young heroes who seized their moment, while celebrating a future where every voice, no matter how small, can ignite monumental change. Davey’s rallying cry, ‘Courage cannot erase our fear; courage is when we face our fear’ inspires the group to stand up to formidable powers and demonstrate that their voices matter. I truly hope this show empowers every student in our audience to find their own voice and use it against the injustices in this world to build a better future.”

Rehearsals for *Newsies* take place over several long weekends during the Fall of 2025, with final rehearsals occurring the last week before the actual performances. **This year’s performance venue is the Braden Auditorium at Illinois State University. NEWSIES runs from January 8-10, 2026.** This is a closed event for participants of the Illinois High School Theatre Festival. There are no public tickets available for these performances.

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About the Illinois High School Theatre Festival

Celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, the Illinois High School Theatre Festival (IHSTF) is the largest and oldest non-competitive high school theatre festival in the nation, and is produced by the Illinois Theatre Association. Over 4,000 students, teachers, university representatives, exhibitors, and volunteers come together to put on theatrical workshops and various high school productions. The IHSTF organizes over 120 workshops, with topics such as acting, musical theatre, auditions, improvisation, technical theatre, directing, stage management, make-up and costumes, lighting and special effects, to name a few. In addition, more than 20 high school productions, both showcases and full-length, from around the state are selected to perform at the IHSTF each year.

This year's Festival is led by IHSTF Executive Director Allan Kimball (Southeastern Illinois College - Retired). On the first night of the Festival, participants attend the much-anticipated Opening Performance. Past opening ceremonies have included Broadway's Seth Rudetsky, Wilson Heredia, Tyce Green, Chicago's Second City, The Neo-Futurists, and many others.

Another highlight of the IHSTF includes the college/university auditions for high school juniors and seniors. Students who plan to pursue theatre or musical theatre in college may audition/interview for theatrical programs in and around the state of Illinois. In the past, there have been over 35 colleges/universities in attendance.

Over the main two days of the Festival, attendees will see and participate in different sets of workshops, student showcases, high school productions throughout the day, and various social activities, plus the All-State Production of *Newsies*.

The three-day Festival takes place every year in early January and switches locations between the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Illinois State University.

The IHSTF 2026 Festival is supported in part by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council, and corporate donations or in-kind services. For more information about how to make a contribution please contact Melissa Lagowski, at ITA@illinoistheatre.org or call the Illinois Theatre Association office at 774-804-8975. For more information about the ITA or IHSTF, visit www.illinoistheatre.org.

About the Illinois Theatre Association

Founded in 1972 and celebrating its 50th Festival, the mission of the Illinois Theatre Association is to advocate quality theatre in Illinois through:

- Encouragement and facilitation of closer and better communication amongst all theatrical divisions -- professional theater, university/college theater, secondary school theater, community theater, theatre for young audiences, and creative drama -- in Illinois.
- Provision of public information about the extent and variety of theatre in Illinois;• cooperation with state and federal agencies, and with regional and national theatre organizations in promoting recognition and development of theatre programs at all levels; maintenance and improvement of theatre production, teaching, and research at all levels.
- Affirmation of the value of theatre in the lives of individuals.

The ITA provides support and professional development opportunities for all divisions of theatre. Annual events include the Illinois High School Theatre Festival, Statewide Non-Equity Professional Auditions, Theatre In Our Schools Conference (produced in partnership with the American Alliance of Theatre & Education), and Red Carpet Gala/Awards of Excellence Ceremony. Visit www.illinoistheatre.org.

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2026 ALL-STATE COMPANY

PRODUCTION STAFF

Co-Producer	Michelle DePasquale Bayer	Oak Park River Forest High School
Co-Producer	Christina Ordonez	Hoffman Estates High School
Director	Anna McSweeney	Addison Trail High School
Technical Director	Alex Holod	Addison Trail High School
Asst. Technical Director	Molly O'Connor	Elk Grove High School
Co-Vocal Director	Stacy Cunningham	Leyden High School
Co-Vocal Director	Noah Pligge	Regina Dominican High School
Orchestra Director	Andy Davis	Reavis High School
Co-Choreographer	Joshua Kimball	Southeastern Illinois College
Co-Choreographer	Sarah Mohr	Mohr Time
Scenic Designer	William Hunter Evans	Downers Grove South High School
Master Carpenter	Thom Ringrose	Prospect High School
Prop Designer	Scott Metzker	Wauconda High School
Lighting Designer	Noah Record	Protolight
Co-Sound Engineer	Anthony Bartucci	AB Production Associates
Co-Sound Engineer	Ian Garrett	AB Production Associates
Costume Coordinator	Kendra VanWees	Adlai E. Stevenson High School
Projections Designer	James Reinbacher	Reed Custer High School
Rigging Director	Tracy Nunnally	Vertigo
Production Member at Large	Dori Foster	Rock Island High School
Downstate Liaison	LaDonna Wilson	Retired Teacher
IHSTF Executive Director	Allan Kimball	Southeastern Illinois College - Retired
Production Liaison	Dennis Anastasopoulos	Reavis High School
ISU Interns	Meghan Hartigan	Illinois State University
	Nora Riordan	Illinois State University

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CAST

Elliot Angsurat	Les	Dundee Crown High School
Logan Arroyo	Davey	Lincoln Way East High School
Jack Bicker	Newsie/Spot Understudy	Kaneland High School
Michael Bowman	Newsie	Libertyville High School
Lamari Brock	Spot Conlon/Davey Understudy	Crete-Monee High School
Ava Campos	Mrs. Jacobi/Nun/Hannah Understudy	Murphysboro High School
Nina Carter	Splasher	Buffalo Grove High School
Mara Cardenas-Castro	Elmer	Grayslake North High School
Kenadi Compton	Buttons/Katherine Understudy	Carterville High School
Aaron Connors	Romeo	Lake Zurich High School
Mateo Cruz	Nunzio/Guard/Police	Maine West High School
Alexis Dearth	Dance Captain/Newsie	Coal City High School
Adam DeVerville	Joseph Pulitzer	Hoffman Estates High School
Maya DiBenardo	Newsie	Adlai E. Stevenson H.S.
Benjamin Garner	Finch	Auburn High School
Max Gould	Race	William Fremd High School
Titus Green	Bill/Ensemble	White Wave Academy
Nayan Gupta	Newsie	Conant High School
Jase Heavens	Nun/Bowery Beauty/Medda U.S.	Romeoville High School
Jordyn Helvie	JoJo	Grayslake Cent. High School
Sawyer Horcher	Newsie	Homewood-Flossmoor H.S.
Matthew Jarmoszka	Mayor/Ensemble/Adult Swing	Alan B. Shepard High School
Mary Grace Junkins	Hannah/Nun	St. Ignatius High School
Cameron Junkroski	Teddy Roosevelt/Ensemble	Reed-Custer High School
Joe Kaiser	Newsie	St. Viator High School
Elisha Kline	Henry	Homewood-Flossmoor H.S.
Kolagbade Kolawole	Wiesel	Thornwood High School
Zak Krush	Dance Captain/Newsie	Glenbard North High School
Savannah Le	Newsie	Glenbard North High School
Eli Lee	Tommy Boy	Barrington High School
Mark Martinez	Morris Delancy	Reed Custer High School
Sammy Menapace	Newsie	Benet Academy
Yurem Mesa	Seitz/Crutchie Understudy	East Leyden High School
Ethan Michaels	Specs	Adlai E. Stevenson H.S.
Soren Moan	Snyder	Lockport Township H.S.
Brennan Monaghan	Crutchie	Lake Zurich High School
Kamryn Nelson	Newsie/Les U.S. /Bowery Beauty	Homewood-Flossmoor H.S.
Abby Obradovich	Newsie	Adlai E. Stevenson H.S.
Jordan Olson	Newsie/Swing	Coal City High School
Miguel Patino-Diaz	Jack Kelly	Normal Community H.S.
Lincoln Pixton	Bunsen/Pulitzer Understudy	St. Charles North High School
Madeline Ranieri	Katherine Plumber	William Fremd High School
Grace Regalado	Newsie	Mother McAuley High School
Meira Reid	Darcy/Ensemble	Maine East High School
Jordan Rinkenberger	Albert	Champaign Central H.S.
Alyssa Sayuk	Newsie/Bowery Beauty	Edwardsville High School
Jack Sharp	Newsie	Charleston High School
John Stahl	Mush	Antioch High School
Ava Turek	Newsie	York High School
Nathan Wagner	Oscar Delancy/Jack Understudy	Libertyville High School
Sora Williams	Medda/Nun	Oswego High School

CREW

Karsten Adebayo	Waubonsie Valley High School
Mia Alvarez	Addison Trail High School
Sydney Anderson	Amos Alonzo Stagg High School
Sophia Boun	William Fremd High School
Matthew Brown	Libertyville High School
Emerson Chatham	Crystal Lake South High School
Imogen Coop	Herrin High School
Ray Copeland	Maine West High school
Thomas Decker	Belvidere North High School
Dylan DeWitt	Lakes Community High School
Leo Dupee	Lake Zurich High School
Katherine Field	Deerfield High School
River Finan	Grayslake North High School
Kayla Gdula	Adlai E. Stevenson High School
Nataly Gonzalez	Addison Trail High School
Chloe Graham	Prairie Ridge High School
Max Handmaker	Deerfield High School
Mori Harris	Downers Grove South High School
Rain Heller	Downers Grove North High School
Aden Holzer	United Township High School
Jamie Kaegi	Oak Park and River Forest High School
Ash Komorowski	Homewood-Flossmoor High School
Quinn Krewson	Edwardsville High School
Morgan Lamping	Reed-Custer High School
Nathalia Lebron-Suarez	Collinsville High School
Adam Elijah Lemer	Grayslake North High School
Tess Lerette	Downers Grove North High School
Katelyn Long	Edwardsville High School
Sophia May	Riverside Brookfield High School
Lex McDonald	Waubonsie Valley High School
Levi Medrano	Plainfield Central High School
Emilia Nascimento	Glenbard North High School
Emma Noeth	Naperville North High School
Ryann O'Sullivan	Mother McAuley Liberal Arts High School
Mena Ollins	Oak Park and River Forest High School
Katherine Preciado	Addison Trail High School
Ava Rockrohr	Minooka Community High School
Zion Sands	Homewood-Flossmoor High School
Cosmo Schatz	Victor J Andrew High School
Patrick Schneider	William Fremd High School
Roxanne Stasch	Nazareth Academy
Braden Strasma	Waubonsie Valley High School
Jordan Tkac	Naperville North High School
Braeden Tocke	Wauconda High School
Ean Tomenbang	Willowbrook High School
Joseph Vargas	Addison Trail High School
Serenity Ward	Edwardsville High School
Brody White	Grayslake Central High School
Adler Wilen	South Elgin High School
Hyunjin Winters	Downers Grove South High School
Mornilva Wolfe	Glenbard North High School
Jeffrey Zavelisky	Lake Forest Academy

ORCHESTRA

Ivan Calderon	Trumpet	Conant High School
Sydney Carlson	Keyboards	Rolling Meadows High School
Kameron Cole Reeds	Minooka	Community High School
Braden Estanilla	Bass	Oak Park and River Forest High School
Caden Felicilda	Cello	Antioch High School
Daniel Fishel	Reeds	Mundelein High School
Emelie Gutierrez	Reeds	East Leyden High School
Max Haines	Keyboards	Reavis High School
Akshay Jaladi	Reeds	Libertyville High School
Rachel Kierzkowski	Violin	Adlai E. Stevenson High School
Will Reinholdt	Drums	Oak Park and River Forest High School
Andrew Schinler	Trombone	Libertyville High School
Mary-Terese Tamondong	Percussion	Addison Trail High School
Sam Vota	Flute/Piccolo	Coal City High School
David Wurl	Trumpet	Warren Township High School
Peri Yim	Violin	Stevenson High School
Emily Ying-Orjuela	Percussion	Central High School

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