

FALL
2020

Enlightener

EA
EAST AURORA
SCHOOL DISTRICT 131

OUR NEW EXCEL ACADEMY (EA)²



**STUDENTS TAKE BRAVE NEW STEPS TOWARD
EDUCATION AND CAREER SUCCESS**

INSIDE:

ANOTHER YEAR OF
POSITIVE GROWTH
PAGE 2

FIRST LOOK:
STATE REPORT CARD
PAGES 4-5

MEET YOUR BOARD
OF EDUCATION
PAGE 8

Another Year of Positive Growth



Dr. Jennifer Norrell
Superintendent

News flash! A success story continues to take shape on the east side of Aurora. It's a story about student growth and achievement. Filled at times with challenges beyond our control, including a global pandemic. This is our story—full of grit and determination, hard work and heavy lifting.

This publication shares how our district and its 14,000 students have made incredible academic progress in several key areas—from number of advanced placement classes taken, college credits earned, increased graduation rates, freshmen on track, and a reduction in truancy. As I have said, all kids possess a natural ability to succeed, and when given a fair chance, they will.

Nineteen months ago our Board of Education embraced a new five-year strategic plan. The plan includes four guiding principles: Educational Equity, Operational Excellence, Collaborative Leadership, and Student Achievement. These compass-like principles connect directly to our academic progress and provide the foundation for all students to *reach their full potential*.

Join me in congratulating our students and teachers for their accomplishments on this year's State Report Card. While the pandemic conditions have frozen our state designations due to spring testing cancellation, we recognize the hard work evidenced by our data shared after the first semester of last year in December of 2019. We know everyone, including our parents who are supporting learning at home, will continue to work hard this school year and add to their success story in the coming year. See pages 4-5 for the highlights:

Record Number of Students Taking AP Classes:

A record-high **762** students enrolled in a variety of 26 Advanced Placement courses, and another record number of over **650** exams passed—resulting in college credit totaling roughly **\$1,164,547** in college tuition savings! We continue to increase access to college-level coursework at East High, helping prepare our Tomcats for post-secondary opportunities and making college more affordable and accessible.

Record Number of Kindergarteners Ready for Learning:

A record-high number of Kindergarten students, **92.8%**, demonstrated readiness for learning on 14 measures. Kudos to our *Tiny Tomcat* Preschool programs and Kindergarten teachers! East Aurora outperformed the State by almost 5%, compared to last year scoring 11% below the state average.

Increase in Student Attendance / Decrease in Chronic Truancy:

Across the district, our average daily attendance increased over 4%, and chronic truancy decreased from 22% to 12%, demonstrating that more and more students and families are realizing the direct connection between daily school attendance and academic achievement as evidenced by data *before the mandated shut down 4th quarter*.

Increased Graduation Rate: In 2020, East High students achieved a graduation rate of 75%, up 8% over last year. Many factors contributed to this increase, including student attendance, which improved considerably as chronic truancy was down over 50%, and behavioral infractions were also down 75% within the first semester of last year. Our team developed many strategic and intentional methods to ensure students who were close to graduating, did so. Included in this was our new program *East Aurora Excel Academy*, or (EA)². See page six to learn more. Increases to 4th year students "on-track to graduate" were reported on December of 2019, *prior to the mandatory shutdown in March*.

Meeting Critical Student Needs During the Pandemic:

Since in-person learning was disrupted on March 13, our district has provided more than 400,000 meals to students at school sites and bus stops throughout the east side of Aurora. Through the commitment of our Board of Education, this year EASD 131 ensured that every student from preschool to high school, was issued a device for remote learning. And through a partnership with T-Mobile's EmpowerED™ program, our district ensured that all East Aurora students have an equal opportunity to learn at home, by providing access to a mobile hotspot device that families may use at home to connect up to five devices to the internet.

We know that our students will come back to in-person learning excited and ready to continue their successes demonstrated last year prior to the pandemic- but most importantly we want them to return healthy!

Stay tuned while our success story continues.

While we are pleased with the progress made, we intend to reach for even higher achievements and strive for even greater goals.

Proudly,

Dr. Jennifer Norrell, Superintendent
East Aurora School District 131

Enlightener is a community newsletter published by East Aurora School District 131.
417 Fifth Street
Aurora, IL 60505
(630) 299-5550

www.d131.org
info@d131.org
facebook.com/EASD131
instagram: @EASD131
twitter: @EASD131
vimeo.com/easd131

SUPERINTENDENT
Dr. Jennifer Norrell

BOARD OF EDUCATION
Ms. Annette Johnson,
President
Mr. Dan Barreiro,
Vice President
Ms. Kimberley Hatchett,
Secretary
Mr. Alex Arroyo
Ms. Avis Miller
Mr. Bruce Schubert
Mr. Juan Sifuentes, Jr.
Ms. Abigail Callinan*
Mr. Moises Jimenez*

*Student Board Member

Follow us to see more EASD 131 student and staff achievements.



Board of Education Update

Technology helping students participate during challenging times

The global pandemic has changed our world and certainly the way we educate young people on the east side of Aurora.

While remote learning can never take the place of daily, in-person instruction, we can all be proud of the steps our district has taken to ensure that remote learning offers the best possible option for our students.

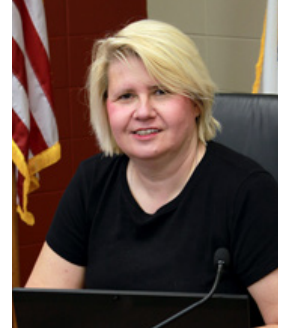
Our Board is proud of the fact that every student in our district has been issued full technology to participate in remote learning. We are reminded of our diligence in prior years, in cleaning up the finances and making sound financial decisions that have now allowed us to be able to provide this level of support at a time most critically needed.

In March of 2020, when the pandemic first affected in-person instruction, our Board acted quickly to approve the purchase of iPads for all our elementary students. These tablets provided a critical tool to our students in Kindergarten through 5th grade. Our middle school and high school students use a district-issued laptop, while our preschool students have been issued iPad mini devices to continue a critical connection with their teacher and learning.

When the pandemic began, our Board was greatly concerned that some of our families may not have reliable access to the internet, and that this would create an inequity among our students. For this reason, we approved the acquisition of 3,400 hotspots through a special program with T-Mobile. The addition of hotspots allowed a great number of high school students in need to sit for AP exams in the spring, and continues to provide many students with the tools they need to participate and be academically successful in school.

We have also approved the district's paid partnership with

Google Enterprise to provide the entire suite of options to support Google Classroom. This suite is used as the primary teaching tool and quasi-learning management system (LMS). We have also allowed the district to maintain the Microsoft O365 and Teams platform, which maintains a solid back-up platform and complements with Teams Live events for larger presentations, Teams meeting options for Professional Learning Communities to stay connected, and Teams calling, which provides a phone number for each teacher, administrator, and support staff to support full communication from any location, with families.



Annette Johnson
Board President

As a Board, we commend our Superintendent, Dr. Jennifer Norrell, and our Teaching & Learning and Technology departments, who have worked collaboratively to provide a robust remote learning experience. We also applaud our teachers, who have done an outstanding job at implementing creativity and flexibility, and making the best of a challenging time for our students, families and our community.

Like everyone else, our Board looks forward to the day when East Aurora School District 131 can safely welcome back all our students and teachers to the classroom for in-person learning. Until then, our hard work, flexibility, and investment in technology will help ensure all our students can continue learning during these unprecedented times.



Through the commitment of the Board of Education, every student—from preschool to high school, was issued a device for remote learning.



First Look: 2020 State Report Card

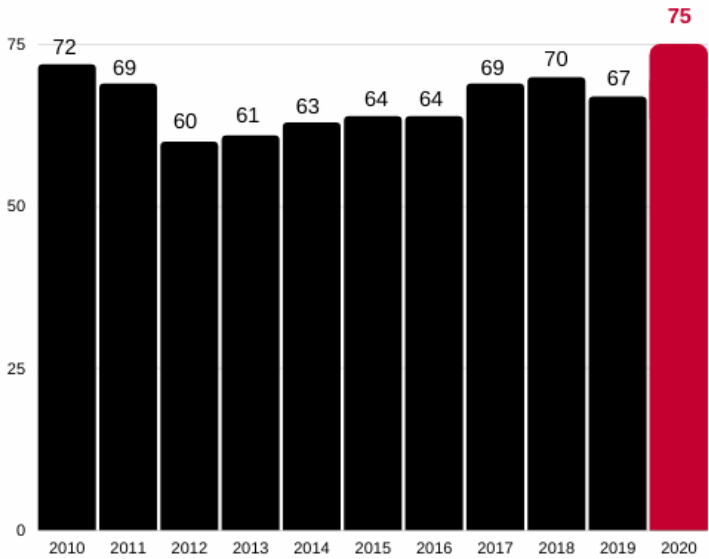
A ten-year high graduation rate, a sharp increase in student attendance, a record number of students taking Advanced Placement (AP) classes, an increase of freshman on track to graduate—all while meeting critical student needs during a global pandemic. These are just several of the accomplishments featured in this year's State Report Card. East Aurora students continue to grow academically at impressive levels, thanks to the hard work of our parents, teachers, school leaders, and community partners. Educational Equity, Operational Excellence, Collaborative Leadership, and Student Achievement will continue to be our guiding principles, as together we support our students during this unprecedented school year.



Our Guiding Principles

- Educational Equity
- Operational Excellence
- Collaborative Leadership
- Student Achievement

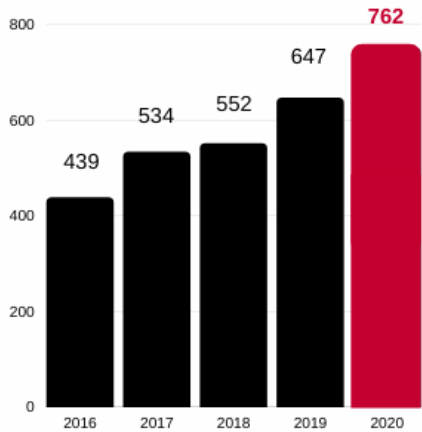
Graduation Rate



↑ 8%

A 10-year high and 8% increase over last year's graduation rate

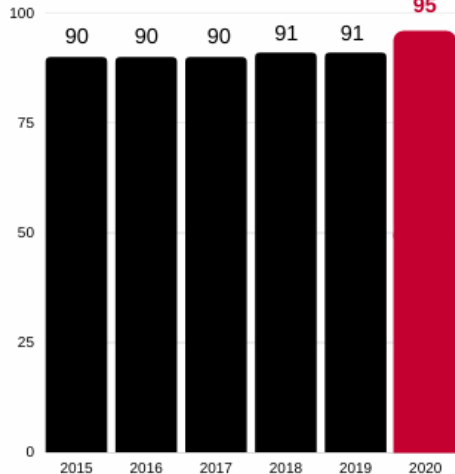
Students Taking AP Classes



↑ 18%

18% increase over last year

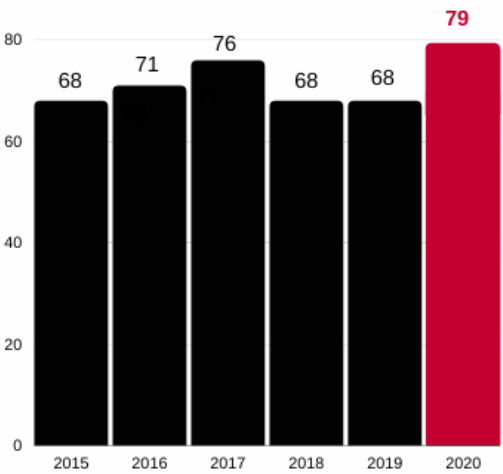
Average Daily Attendance



↑ 4%

Average daily attendance, district-wide, up over 4% from previous year

Freshmen On Track to Graduate



↑ 11%

Over 11% more freshmen on track to graduate in four years

Response to COVID-19

Since March 2020, EASD 131 invested \$5.8 million to support students and families with meals, technology, and resources during COVID-19.



400,000

Meals distributed to students at school sites and bus stops



14,000+

iPads and laptops issued to students for 1:1 devices



3,400

T-Mobile hotspots made available to families to keep students connected to remote learning

Student Enrollment

2020-2021 IL State Report Card

13,561 Students

654
Preschool



4,859
Elementary (1-5)



881
Kindergarten



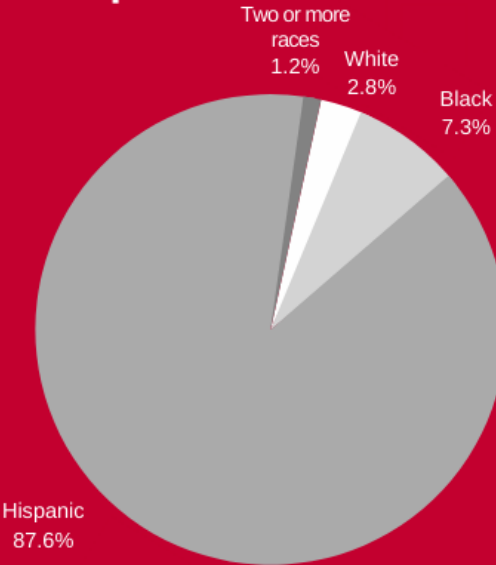
3,097
Middle School (6-8)



44%
Language Learners
(State average 13%)

4,070
High School (9-12)

Student Makeup



East Aurora Excel Academy (EA)²

Students take brave new steps toward education and career success



Mario Garcia was one of 36 (EA)² students who graduated in the Class of 2020.

In the early fall of 2019, 18-year-old Mario Garcia and his father attended a late-afternoon meeting at District 131 headquarters.

A letter of invitation in hand, and before the global pandemic swept the globe, the Garcias and about 40 other families arrived to hear about a new pilot program specifically for students at imminent risk of dropping out or aging out of high school.

At the meeting, Superintendent Dr. Jennifer Norrell and high school officials shared the program details.

"We told families we were creating a brand new program, and that their child was invited to participate based on their age, and the number of high school credits they had earned," said Dr. Norrell. "The high school scrubbed their data and identified a population of students who were close to either dropping out, or aging out of high school—without a diploma or GED."

Dr. Norrell knew full-well this group of young people would soon leave East High without a diploma or training, yet still reside on the east side of Aurora. "Why not dig in our heels and do everything we can to help them achieve a diploma, or GED, with job-readiness skills and employment opportunities? It's good for the students, but it's also good for our community."

Soon after the meeting, Mario Garcia, along with 44 others signed up for the pilot program called "The East Aurora Excel Academy" or "(EA)²".

The program involves a partnership with Quad County Urban League, Communities In Schools, and Waubesa Community College. Through the program, students can earn either their diploma or GED, while obtaining job-readiness skills through training programs with workforce partners such as Prologis, Nicor Gas, ComEd, and UPS. Following the programs, they have the opportunity to be immediately hired.

Mario and the other students began taking high school classes online, at the Urban League's *Dunham Career Center*. One of the case managers at Quad County Urban League, Jaren Stewart, was assigned to interact daily with Mario and provide one-on-one support.

Stewart immediately connected with Mario. He made sure Mario was consistent with class attendance, and developed a mentorship role with Mario by spending time with his family and playing soccer.

"At times my role was just keeping him personally inspired," said Stewart.

The entire staff at (EA)² kept students motivated, holding celebrations for goals achieved, or when courses were completed. In addition to the celebrations, Stewart said a key element was to remove the negative influences students have had as much as possible, and instead provide a positive "add on" to the family.

When Mario wasn't at (EA)² working on his classes, he received real-life work experience in certificate programs, through partners like Prologis. In a short time, Mario became more and more consistent in the program, and showed a lot of optimism.

"He's so smart," said Stewart. "It's crazy to think that someone as talented and as curious as Mario, wasn't going to graduate."

Not graduating wasn't on Mario's mind four years ago when he began at East High School. But for personal issues that a high schooler sometimes goes through, he fell off track.

"I would say that my first couple of years in high school, I chose to hang around with others who got me to lose my focus," said Mario.

While classes continued, Mario then began a job program with UPS, working 4 to 8 p.m. at the UPS facility in Hodgkins. (EA)² even provided bus transportation.

Mario did well at UPS. Stewart was especially proud of Mario when he persevered after a few others around him quit. Mario was happy with his work at UPS too, and said he was even being considered for a promotion. "For me, I was happy I was getting paid, and when you do your best, supervisors notice it and they may even promote you."

In March of 2020, Mario reached his goal: he completed the remaining classes he needed for graduation.

"It felt good to earn my diploma, even though we didn't get to hold a normal graduation due to COVID-19," said Mario. "I still graduated. That's the main point."

After he earned his diploma, Mario joined a *YouthBuild* program, authorized by the Department of Labor. *YouthBuild* offers a pre-apprenticeship program for construction, where Mario has since gained several certifications, including the OSHA Outreach Training Program and fork lift certification.

From there Mario will begin the Nicor Gas Career Academy, a six-week job readiness program that prepares participants for careers in the utility industry. Mario will receive safety training, participate in job shadowing, learn how to use trade tools, and more. The Academy can serve as a pipeline to professional job training and access to jobs, complete with networking with hiring managers.

Mario's future? Stewart believes that in five years Mario will be working at an experienced-level position at Nicor or with one of their partners, and he will be a great example for his family and community.

"Mario's worked really hard and completed a lot of our offerings ... leadership training, employability skills. He's going to break the cycle of poverty that affects his community—completely shatter it through the roof. I can see it."

Looking back, Mario admits he needed a different environment to reach his goal of graduation.



Vince Zuppa (left), Director of Property Management, and Jeff Folkmann (right), Chicago Market Officer for Prologis present a Prologis Workforce completion certificate to Mario Garcia in September 2019.

"My freshman and sophomore year, I honestly didn't think I would graduate, but this program helped me not only graduate, but get job training and work experience."

Mario's mother is certain that his recent successes in school and on the job have changed him.

"He just looks more happy. I think it's because he knows he is learning, and he's been earning some money from his job."

"I'm so happy that he's doing well and making something for his own life. We are not rich and can't leave him a great inheritance, but because of this program, he's creating his own success."

To learn more about East Aurora Excel Academy (EA)² call (630) 299-8120 or (630) 299-8130.

First-year program results, 2019-2020

58 Students enrolled in the East Aurora Excel Academy (EA)²

36 Earned a high school diploma

13 Earned their GED

Current year, 2020-2021

49 Students enrolled in the East Aurora Excel Academy (EA)²

Meet Your Board of Education

The EASD 131 Board of Education consists of seven volunteer members elected to serve four-year terms.

The Board of Education is responsible for determining the policies which guide the operation of the district. The State of Illinois gives local school boards responsibility for setting policies in approval of courses of study and textbooks, adoption of an annual budget, construction, furnishing and maintenance of facilities, employment, and hiring and evaluation of the superintendent.

Learn more about the Board of Education at www.d131.org.



Ms. Annette Johnson, President

Years of Service:
2009-present



Mr. Dan Barreiro, Vice President

Years of Service:
2003-2007; 2017-present



Ms. Kimberly Hatchett, Secretary

Years of Service:
2015-present



Mr. Alex Arroyo

Years of Service:
2015-present



Ms. Avis Miller

Years of Service:
2019-present



Mr. Bruce Schubert

Years of Service:
2017-present



Mr. Juan Sifuentes Jr.

Years of Service:
2019-present



Abigail Callinan

Student Board Member
2020-2021 school year



Moises Jimenez

Student Board Member
2020-2021 school year

Board of Education:
**Seven years of accomplishments with no
increase in property taxes**

2013-2014

- Fred Rodgers Magnet Academy purchased, renovated, opened
- VNA Healthcare Clinic expansion in East High School

2014-2015

- Benavides Kindergarten Center built and opened
- Kindergarten for all students
- Expanded alternative school services; developed East Aurora Extension Campus Middle and High School

2015-2016

- District awarded \$50 million in interest-reimbursable, qualified school construction bonds from Illinois

2016-2017

- East High School expansion: new stadium with artificial turf field, fine arts wing, cafeteria, library, culinary arts, and 20 new classrooms
- Earned "Financial Recognition" designation from the Illinois State Board of Education

2017-2018

- Bus transportation for students PreK-12th for the first time in the district's 167-year history
- New Marie Wilkinson Food Pantry opens at East High School
- Search conducted for new superintendent; Board hires Dr. Jennifer Norrell
- Earned "Financial Recognition" designation from the Illinois State Board of Education

2018-2019

- EASD 131 Strategic Planning; mission, vision, and a five-year strategic plan
- District restructures 16M in debt and increases fund balance
- Historic three-year contract signed with East Aurora Council, AFT Local 604 Teachers Union
- Addition of energy-efficient lighting in all 20 school sites
- East Aurora Excel Academy opens new site on Indian Trail Road
- 59 new air-conditioning rooftop units added across the district
- Earned "Financial Recognition" designation from the Illinois State Board of Education

2019-2020

- New heating and air conditioning added to seven elementary schools
- 1:1 Pre-K through 12th grade electronic devices
- iPad Mini's, iPads, laptops and hotspots for all students
- New Administration District Office purchased
- Newly-built Professional Development Center and Board Room
- Early Childhood Center and adjacent building purchased on Indian Trail Road
- 13 out of 17 schools designated as Commendable Status by State of Illinois
- Earned "Financial Recognition" designation from the Illinois State Board of Education

2020-2021

- Implemented first district-wide Dual Language Program for all Kindergarten
- New heating & air conditioning added to one middle school and two additional elementary schools
- Building expansion for Gonzalez Child Center for Adventures Alternative Program K-5th grade; six new high tech classrooms, pet therapy room, yoga studio, cafeteria, gymnasium and courtyard
- Earned "Financial Recognition" designation from the Illinois State Board of Education

Follow us to see more EASD 131 student and staff achievements.

