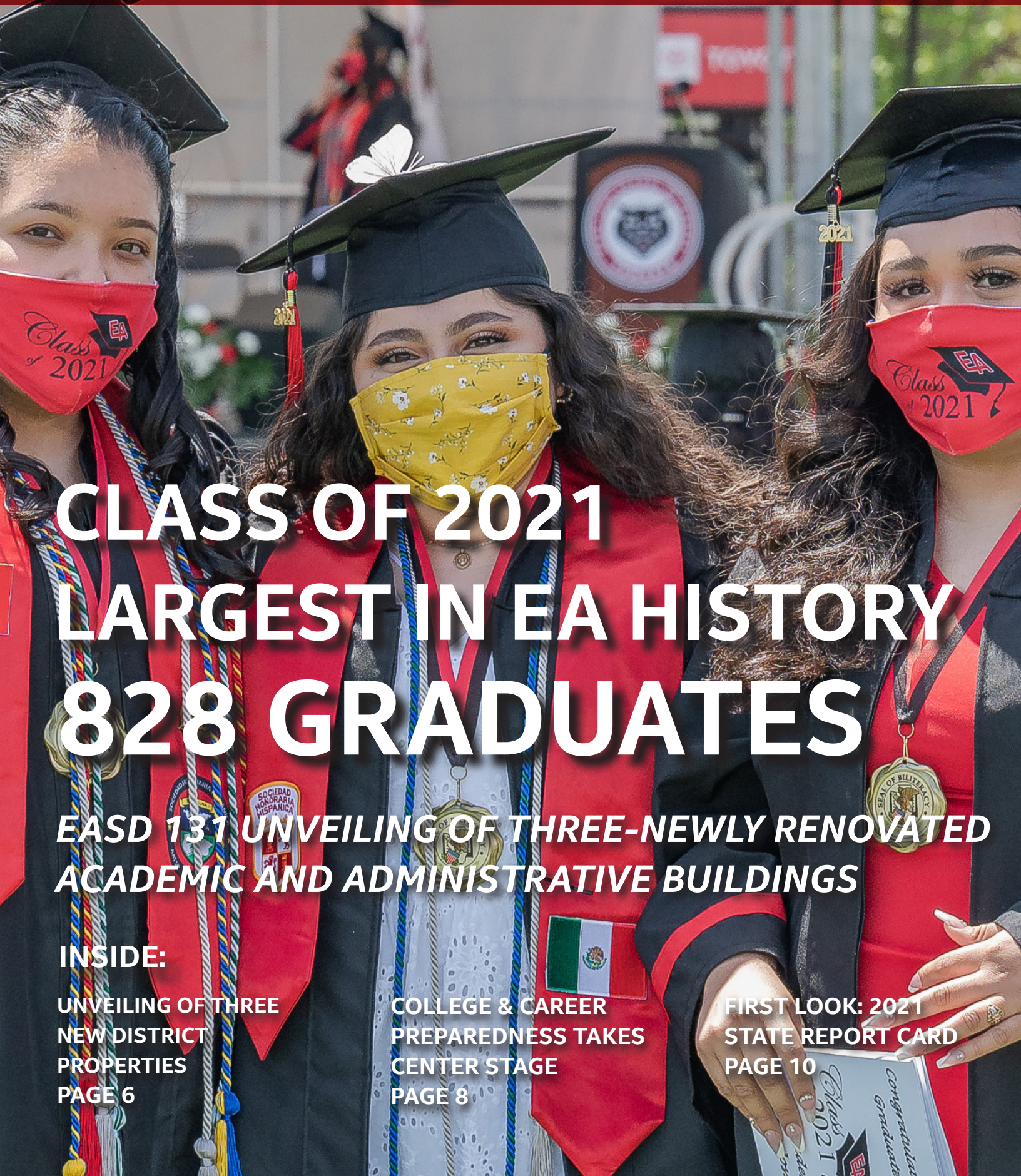


WINTER
2022

Enlightener

EA
EAST AURORA
SCHOOL DISTRICT 131



CLASS OF 2021 LARGEST IN EA HISTORY 828 GRADUATES

**EASD 131 UNVEILING OF THREE-NEWLY RENOVATED
ACADEMIC AND ADMINISTRATIVE BUILDINGS**

INSIDE:

UNVEILING OF THREE
NEW DISTRICT
PROPERTIES
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COLLEGE & CAREER
PREPAREDNESS TAKES
CENTER STAGE
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FIRST LOOK: 2021
STATE REPORT CARD
PAGE 10

Moving Forward & Moving Together



Dr. Jennifer Norrell
Superintendent

Happy 2022 East Aurora Families and Community!

We are celebrating a new year as we also celebrate the past year and all of the many successes that it held. Most importantly, this past year has shown us as a school community that we can accomplish anything as One Team!

I want to recognize the amazing leadership from our Board of Education. These individuals are true leaders and critical partners in challenging us to continually provide the best in academics, resources, and facilities while making decisions that are fiscally responsible for our district. I want to say THANK YOU to our IFT Local #604 union who endured a lengthy but rewarding process of interest-based bargaining this past year despite all the challenges of the pandemic and re-opening of schools. The efforts of our administrative team and the IFT leadership delivered a successful and record breaking 5-year collective bargaining agreement. I also want to thank every staff member for being an active member of our TEAM and making this past year not only possible, but a success.

We remain committed to our students in all that we do in East Aurora School District 131. This year, we recognized that in order to truly help our young people *Reach Their Full Potential* we needed to address their social and emotional wellness. We have prioritized health for both physical safety through our cutting-edge COVID-19 mitigations in all of our buildings and our partnership with Northwestern Lurie Children's Hospital Center for Childhood Resilience. We have also made a concerted effort at each grade level to provide culturally relevant instructional units through integration of the nostalgic concept into our daily lesson planning. These lessons were created by teachers and administration following an extensive professional development series that included the connection between culturally relevant practices and nostalgia, the power of spoken word, and historical representation of diverse populations. Over 900 staff participated in these workshops as East Aurora partnered with Dominican University, Loyola University Chicago, Northwestern University, and University of Illinois Chicago to deliver

high quality professional learning for our teachers, support staff, and administration. We acknowledge how critical it is for our children to feel valued and recognized for who they are along with the wonderful and diverse lineages each family brings to our district.

Our staff continues to engage with parents and community as we prepare to expand our facilities through the Resilience Education Center (The R.E.C.). The R.E.C. will replace our previous Service Center on Fifth Street. The district has held many meetings with students, parents, staff, and community to garner input on the design elements to best support student social wellness. Stay tuned for further information as we move forward this spring with a project completion date of January 2023.

Finally, we are excited as we work with each grade level to provide support to students for learning renewal. We recognize that the periods of remote learning posed some less than ideal academic and SEL circumstances. However, through our assessments of students in both reading and mathematics, we are hopeful that they will be able to recover and make great strides in closing any gaps that may have been widened due to the pandemic. We acknowledge that a continued focus on health and safety is key. We also acknowledge that we must work as One Team, with One Plan to move students successfully from one grade level to the next. Our goal is for every Tomcat to leave our district with the completion of a high school diploma. We continue to thank you for all that you do as our partners in this effort and ask that you continue to support our children!

Proudly,

Dr. Jennifer Norrell, Superintendent
East Aurora School District 131

Enlightener is a community newsletter published by East Aurora School District 131.
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SUPERINTENDENT
Dr. Jennifer Norrell

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*Student Board Member



Board of Education Update

Happy New Year EA School District 131 Community!

We are looking forward to a new year of possibilities for all our children in EASD 131. The board and I recognize how challenging the past two years have been on our entire community. This issue of the Enlightener is so special for that very reason. We not only celebrate the continued achievements of our students, staff, administrators, and parents but, we recognize the tremendous effort that it took to remain focused throughout a world-wide pandemic and motivate our children to engage with school throughout.

In addition to the successes of providing quality remote learning and maintaining student attendance, we have successfully offered graduation support and secured post-secondary plans for roughly 80% of our graduates. This culminated last summer with the largest graduating class in the history of the district with over 800 high school graduates!

We look forward to 2022 despite the pandemic, as we continue to forge ahead with not only academics but also with facilities improvements and expansion efforts. We are scheduled to complete an additional 5 HVAC projects which include 3 additional middle schools and 2 elementary schools thus completing new heating and air-conditioning updates for all schools across the district in just 3 years. We also are excited to begin construction on our new Resilience Education Center (The R.E.C.) on Fifth Street.

We also celebrate the opening of both the Adventures Program at the Gonzalez Child Center and the new Administrative Center on Seminary Avenue. The district was so proud to be a part of a 25-year effort to renovate and rehabilitate the old Copley Hospital Campus. Thank you to Mayor Irvin and City of Aurora as well as Fox Valley Developers for your partnership in this effort.



Annette Johnson
Board President

The Board continues to be proud of its ability to oversee all of this success and still maintain the lowest property tax rate for its residents out of all Kane County school districts.

Lastly, I would like to say kudos and congratulations to our Superintendent Dr. Jennifer Norrell on her nomination and selection as Superintendent of the Year 2022 for the Kishwaukee Region of the Illinois Principals Association! Our district continues to move in a very positive direction and the Board is excited for the future and continued success for our students and our community at-large.

Thank you for your partnership!

Annette Johnson
Board of Education President



EASD 131 JUMPSTART PROGRAM

Help your children reach their full potential before they enter preschool! East Aurora School District's Jumpstart Program offers **FREE** parenting enrichment services to families with children from prenatal through age three.

Let the Jumpstart team walk alongside you on this parenting journey. Visit www.d131.org/jumpstart or call **(630) 299-7493** for more information.

COVID-19 MITIGATION IN SCHOOLS

ACTIVEPURE UNITS

Approximately **1,500** Vollara air purification units are dispersed throughout the district in classrooms, offices, and public areas such as libraries, cafeterias, and gymnasiums. These units, with ActivePure technologies, actively reduce airborne pathogens on surfaces and in the air.



RESIDUAL HAND SANITIZER DISPENSERS

Over **1,100** hand sanitizer wall dispensers from Covalon Technologies have been placed in every classroom and all district hallways. CovaGuard Antimicrobial Hand Sanitizer kills pathogens on the skin's surface for up to 4 days.



SHIELD TESTING

10% of students and staff are being tested on a weekly basis throughout the district. The district's adoption of SHIELD Testing, a saliva-based test, is one way the district has remained proactive about COVID-19 screening protocols and mitigating the spread of the coronavirus.



CLASSROOMS & BUILDINGS

Masks are required for students per current CDC, IDPH, and KCHD guidance. There is three feet of physical distance in classrooms with hand sanitizer available. Each teacher is required to have a seating chart to organize classroom space with COVID-19 mitigations in mind.



Low Tax Rates While Expanding Opportunities

While enjoying one of the lowest tax rates in the area, the district has also remained focused on expanding opportunities for students. In 2022 and onward, the district will continue to evaluate financial projections in light of upcoming capital improvements. These include our dual language program, early childhood programs, and other new programs under consideration by the district. As a district with several older school buildings, we must also remain focused on eliminating operational inefficiencies and maintaining them in a cost-effective manner.

In 2020, heating and air conditioning upgrades were completed for seven schools, with more finalized in 2021 and planned for 2022. Finally, we are pleased to report that East Aurora School District 131 has achieved the designation of "Financial Recognition" from the Illinois State Board of Education. This is the 6th consecutive year the district has received this designation. We are grateful to our Board of Education and district leadership for their hard work in achieving this important distinction.

6

Number of consecutive years the Illinois State Board of Education has designated EASD 131 as "Financial Recognition" – the highest possible ranking.

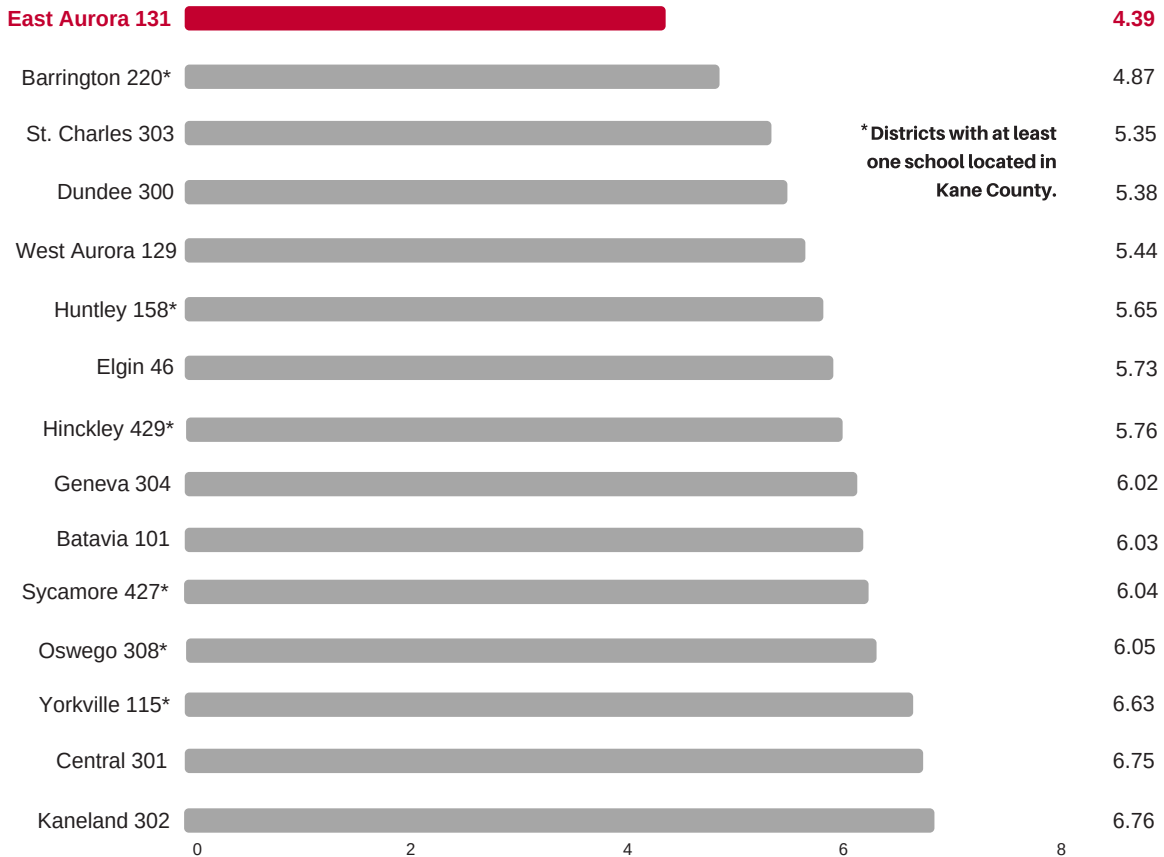
Financial Recognition

Financial Review

Financial Early Warning

Financial Watch

EASD 131 ranked lowest tax rate of all school districts where a majority of the property is located in Kane County.



7

Number of consecutive years the EASD 131 tax rate has been reduced.

↓

2021

2020

2019

2018

2017

2016

2015

Unveiling of Three New District Properties

District 131 opened a new Administrative Center at 310 Seminary Avenue, Aurora



From left to right: EASD 131 Superintendent Dr. Jennifer Norrell, Board of Education President Annette Johnson, board members Juan Sifuentes, Jr., Avis Miller, Bruce Schubert, Alex Arroyo, and Dan Barreiro (not pictured: Kimberly Hatchett).

The East Aurora 131 Board of Education and Superintendent of Schools have worked together steadily to manifest the district's strategic goals--including operational excellence and collaborative leadership--into tangible action. The renovation and opening of three new facilities for the 2021-2022 school year has illustrated that such commitment produces results.

On July 7, 2021 a new Administrative Center opened at 310 Seminary Avenue in Aurora, centralizing over 100 district-level employees and streamlining vital communication between the district and its parents, alumni, business partners, and the greater Aurora community.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony, led by Board of Education President Annette Johnson, Superintendent Dr. Jennifer Norrell, and City of Aurora Mayor Richard C. Irvin, kicked off the opening of this new center. The facility includes an expansive Board Room for Board of Education meetings and internal professional development, three levels of staff offices and meeting spaces and--most impactful--a one-stop location for student registration, screenings, financial appointments, district leadership meetings, and more.

"This is the largest project the east side of Aurora has seen in generations, with East Aurora School District 131 as the anchor," said Irvin.

The renovation and opening of the new Administrative Center has reflected the school board's desire to make it easier for thousands of families to connect with district leadership and operations.

"The Board of Education places children and families first in all ways," said Norrell at the ribbon-cutting. "You constantly do what's best for our students, our community, and our staff, without raising any costs to our taxpayers and our community."

In 2021, the district purchased and renovated an extension of a building where one of its facilities, the Early Childhood Center, currently operates on Indian Trail. This is the site of the East Aurora Excel Academy and future site of an EA career education center.

Before the school year was too underway, district leadership held a final inauguration for a brand new program in a newly remodeled district building.

The Adventures program is a district-wide general education program for students in grades K-5 and housed in the Aries "Jaybird" Gonzalez Child Center at 1480 Reckinger Road, Aurora. The ribbon-cutting held at the site in October 2021 introduced the program to



Board of Education President, Annette Johnson and City of Aurora Mayor, Richard C. Irvin



district and community leaders, reminding all of the inclusive progress made for East Aurora students and families due to the combined efforts of the Board of Education and district leadership.

“In East Aurora, we don’t look backward for very long. We keep moving forward, opening new doors,” EASD 131 Board of Education President Annette Johnson said at the event.

Featuring a yoga room, sensory classrooms, pet therapy, a large multipurpose room, and a courtyard playground decked with sensory equipment, the Adventures center is designed for students who may need a non-traditional school environment to grow and succeed academically, socially, and emotionally.

“Dr. Norrell came to us not long ago and told the Board about some special young learners who, at an early age, did not succeed in a traditional class setting. With some innovative learning concepts, we could get them on the right path, so they can return to a traditional class setting and pursue the path of excellence that the East Aurora School District provides,” Johnson said.

Adventures has been a collaborative endeavor between District 131 teachers and district leadership looking for the best resources to help EA students succeed and a Board of Education who Dr. Norrell says “really cares and is willing to do whatever is necessary.”



Board President Annette Johnson shared with community leaders how fitting it was that the new Adventures program was housed at the Aries “Jaybird” Gonzalez Child Center, a building named after a former student in the district.

“Jaybird had many health struggles at an early age at Beaupre Elementary. It took him two years to graduate from kindergarten, but he persevered, and he did it. The night after graduating, he passed away,” said Johnson. “Every child deserves a champion, an adult who will never give up on them, who insists they can become the best they possibly can be. That is what Adventures is all about.”

The sensory classrooms give students alternative seating options and the ability to learn in a non-traditional classroom environment.

The multipurpose room allows students to spread out while engaging in social activities to break up their day.

Students will also get to interact with a comfort dog named *Vuolo*.



College & Career Preparedness Takes Center Stage

Former Director of K-12 Services at Midwestern Regional Office of the College Board joins District 131

Asa Gordon's desk is covered in piles of printed student profiles, college readiness blueprints, and the district's Strategic Plan. There are also sticky notes and torn notepad pages hastily scribbled down with parent names, phone numbers, and often only one to two words as a reminder of what made that conversation so essential--not that he'll need the reminder; he's already committed that connection to memory.

East Aurora's Director of Middle and Secondary College and Career Readiness swivels to these piles, to his computer, and back. He has a story for each of these names spread out before him, but it's the stories he hopes these students and parents will tell themselves that excites Mr. Gordon the most.

Paving the roads for students and their families to advocate for themselves and make the best, most informed post-graduate decisions is at the center of his role in East Aurora, according to Mr. Gordon.

"How do you set up those pathways and pipelines for students, so by the time they're seniors, they have options? As educators, as the adults [in the room], we want to put them in the best position possible when they graduate."

Having previously worked as the liaison between over 70 schools in the state of Illinois and the College Board, an international nonprofit organization connecting students to thousands of educational institutions, Gordon knew that moving from a macro view of college and career readiness to direct work with one district community meant understanding the needs of that smaller community on a holistic level--then making a concrete plan for meeting those needs head-on.

For Gordon, this begins with the conversations that adults in a student's life--teachers, counselors, parents, advisors--are having with them about not only what they want to achieve, but what they have the ability to achieve.

"Who is tapping students on the shoulder saying, 'Yes, you can.' How do you create structures for students who don't yet know what they can do and how they can do it?"

East Aurora High School's NJROTC program, one of the largest in the state, is a "gold mine" for recruiters looking to admit students to West Point, the Naval Academy, and other officer training programs, according to Gordon.

Informing students as early as the 9th grade of the options available and setting them up on a pathway that utilizes their skills is what Gordon hopes to sow at the high school level and earlier.



Asa Gordon, Director of Middle and Secondary College and Career Readiness

The PSAT 8/9 is a newly introduced test for East Aurora middle schoolers that provides feedback on their performance in skills and strengths needed for successful college and career readiness.

"Counselors are going to each 8th grade student and explaining their PSAT 8/9 score--what it means, and if they want to improve it, here's what they can do," Gordon said.

Parents can also play a crucial role in their ability to get their students thinking about college and career plans.

"Parent engagement has traction, it produces results."

Gordon points to the parent advisory councils, the Bilingual Parent Advisory Council and the African American Parent Association, that the district invests in as proof that the ripple effect knows no bounds when parents see one another advocating for their children and their future.

When a parent sees another parent speak up, ask questions, share their story of connecting with an administrator who is advocating for their child--"that kind of impact is instantaneous," according to Gordon.

Ultimately Gordon asks himself how leadership in the district can empower parents to open these doors, start these conversations, and advocate for their child--helping their child, in the long run, to advocate for themselves.

"For me, it's personal. Ultimately having personal conversations and connecting with students to get them to understand how they can put themselves on the right path...[is how we reconstruct] how we, as educators, can advocate for students."

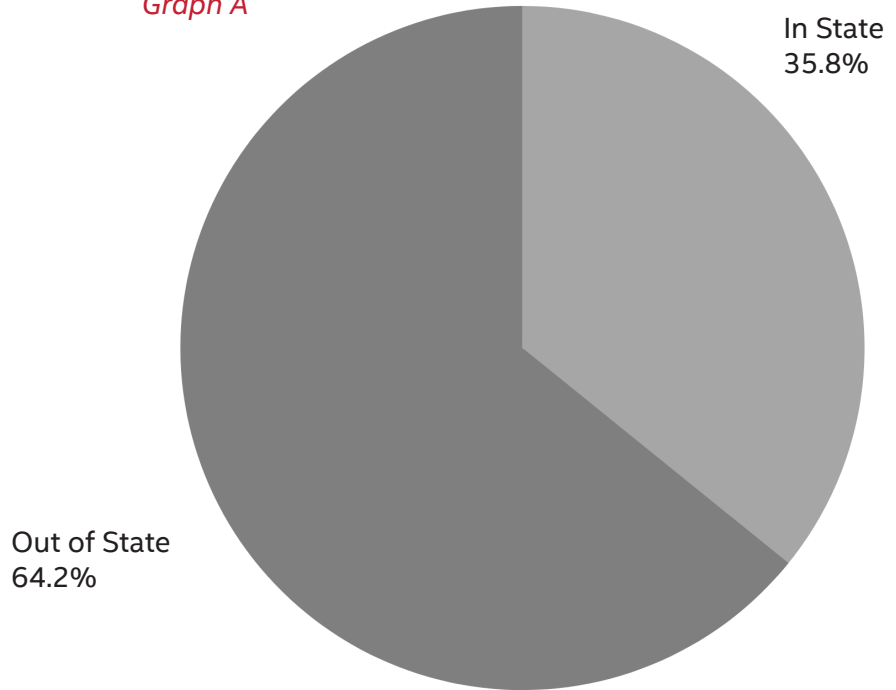
The path Gordon himself followed to be in this position of advocacy for East Aurora students was paved by Superintendent of Schools Dr. Jennifer Norrell. From his seat at the College Board, Gordon knew that when Norrell joined the district in 2018 positive, lasting change was coming to the D131 community.

“She’s always six to seven steps ahead of everyone,” Gordon said.

With strengthened goals in the realm of college and career readiness, being leaps and bounds ahead is exactly what we hope for East Aurora students to be. That sixth or seventh step may be far out, but it bodes greatness.

621 students were accepted to over 125 colleges and universities throughout the country. Graph A shows the percentage of college acceptances in Illinois (In State) vs. Out of State. Graph B shows the graduate breakdown of Cohort 2021.

Graph A



Graph B

COHORT 2021	Graduates	828
	Scholarship Total	\$16,665,669
	State Scholars	30
	College Acceptance	621
	Enrollment in Military/Vocational	35
	College Board National Hispanic Scholar	1



First Look: 2021 State Report Card

In 5 years, the number of students taking AP classes has nearly doubled and the graduate rate is at a 10-year high once again. Freshmen students continue on target to graduate. After an uncertain year, East Aurora students re-entered in-person learning with a commitment to stepping back into excellence. These accomplishments, featured in this year's State Report Card, could not have been realized without the dedication of our parents, teachers, school leaders, board members, and community partners. As we move forward, together, our guiding principles of Educational Equity, Operational Excellence, Collaborative Leadership, and Student Achievement will continue to frame our passion for supporting East Aurora students academically, socially, and emotionally.



Our Guiding Principles

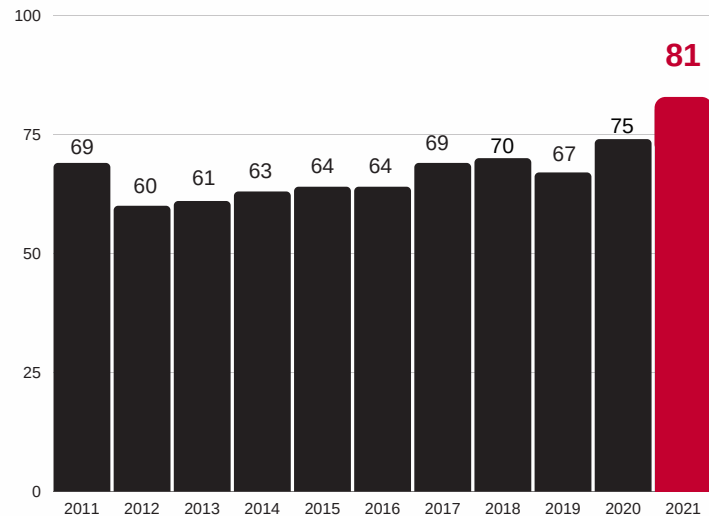
Educational Equity

Operational Excellence

Collaborative Leadership

Student Achievement

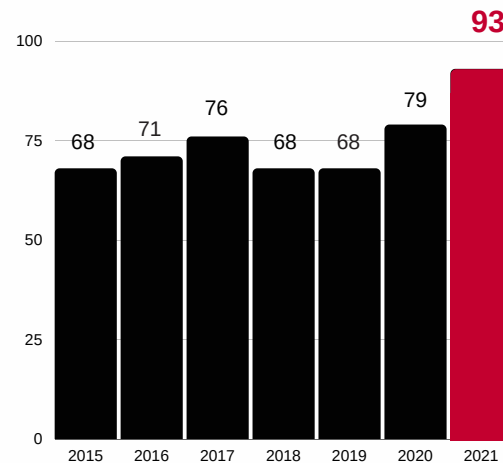
Graduation Rate



↑ 6%

A 10-year high and 6% increase over last year's graduation rate.

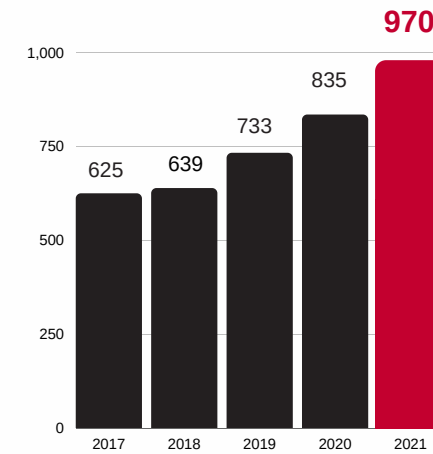
Freshmen On Track to Graduate



↑ 14%

Over 14% more freshmen on track to graduate in four years.

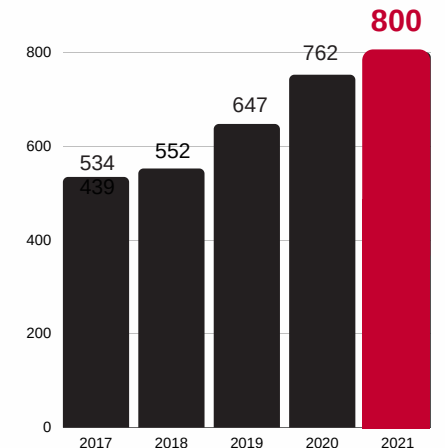
Total Students Taking *Early College Courses



↑ 16%

16% increase over last year.
*Early college courses include Advanced Placement and Dual Credit.

Students Taking AP Classes



↑ 5%

5% increase over last year.

Spotlight on Vocabulary.com

District 131 students in grades 6-12 students use this platform to become better readers, writers, and communicators.



1M

Nearly 1 million vocabulary questions answered by our students

34,405

Words mastered

Student Enrollment

Enrollment numbers as of December 2021

13,009 Students

625
Preschool
(with Jumpstart: 692)

814
Kindergarten

4,334
Elementary (1-5)

2,045
Middle School (6-8)

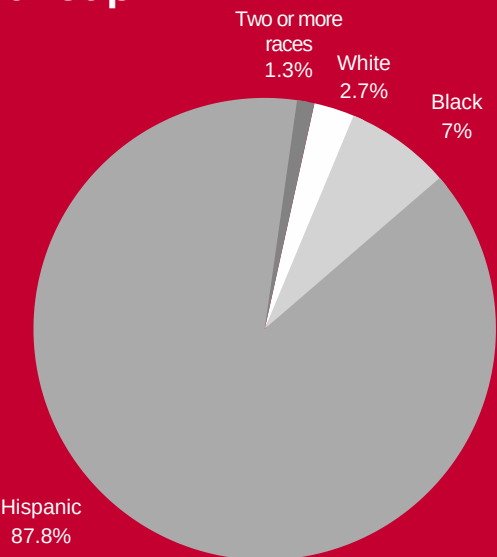
4,178
High School (9-12)

Student Makeup



44%

Language Learners
(State average 13%)



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



Lorena Alvarez
Student Board Member
2021-2022 school year



Christian Madera
Student Board Member
2021-2022 school year

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

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
- EASD 131 earned "Financial Recognition" 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
- EASD 131 earned "Financial Recognition" 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
- EASD 131 earned "Financial Recognition" 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
- EASD 131 earned "Financial Recognition" 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
- EASD 131 earned "Financial Recognition" from the Illinois State Board of Education

2021-2022

- Adventures program opens in addition to a brand new Administrative Center in the old Copley Center Campus
- HVAC upgrades scheduled for Summer 2022 for five additional buildings
- Expanded the district-wide Dual Language program to include all Kindergarten and 1st grade students
- EASD 131 earned "Financial Recognition" from the Illinois State Board of Education

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

