

2025 WINTER/
SPRING ISSUE

Enlightener

EA
EAST AURORA
SCHOOL DISTRICT 131

FRED RODGERS MAGNET ACADEMY RECOGNIZED AS A



“BEST MIDDLE SCHOOL”



Enlightener is a community newsletter published by East Aurora School District 131.

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Dr. Jennifer Norrell

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*Student Board Member



Celebrate with Confidence



Dr. Jennifer Norrell
Superintendent

Dear East Aurora District 131 Families, Students, and Staff,

I want to begin with a huge thank you to each member of our school community at-large. For the past 7 years each of you has done your part toward the advancement of EA 131 and it has had a tremendous impact. We celebrate the successes of our students, staff and leadership that has been courageously led by our Board of Education.

A board that has remained committed in both action and progress toward the betterment of our students and all east side of Aurora residents, homeowners and tax-payers.

East Aurora School District 131 has benefited from exceptional community partners that have supported our student's growth and achievement. We have also increased our parent engagement, empowering larger numbers of parents to participate in the planning for their child's learning and school environment.

Reflecting on the incredible journey we've shared over the past seven years while serving as your Superintendent has been one of the most rewarding chapters of my life—a time filled with growth, challenges, and countless moments of pride in the strength and spirit of our community.

I want each of you to enjoy this issue of the Enlightener and reflect on the huge progress we have made together. Please continue this work with confidence as the amazing community and student population that is EASD 131!



Legacy of Excellence



Annette Johnson
Board President

EASD 131 Community,

We continue our Board of Education commitment to provide excellence in schools, facilities and fiscal management. For the past 15 years I have had the privilege to serve on the Board of Education, most of those years serving as Board President. In this role, I have enjoyed working with amazing board members to raise the bar of excellence higher than ever in the 174-year history of East Aurora School District 131. We have built the largest number of new facilities, provided new heating, air-conditioning and lights in all

buildings and upgraded all elementary and PreK playgrounds within just 7 short years. Our student achievement continues to improve with schools receiving State and National recognitions for their high rankings in performance for the first time ever.

We celebrate Statewide recognition and media coverage for our cutting-edge programs including this Fall being recognized as the only district Statewide to offer Dual Language for ALL schools' grades Kindergarten through Fourth and having our EA Paws Program at each elementary school which will be expanding to middle and high schools.

The Board of Education has been a model for districts nationwide, reflecting how to remain committed to excellence districtwide while not raising taxes and costs to our constituents. We have been able to maintain the highest financial rating of Recognition Status from the Illinois State Board of Education and earned an increased Wall Street financial rating of AA-3 from Moody's Ratings. This has all been accomplished while maintaining the lowest tax rate in Kane County and lowering the tax burden to our community for the 11th year in a row.

We invite you all to continue your support of our district and your confidence in our leadership as we continue to move forward setting new records for excellence!



EAST AURORA
SCHOOL DISTRICT 131

2018-2019

- Strategic planning completed: mission, vision, and five-year plan adopted.
- \$16M in debt restructured, improving the fund balance.
- Historic three-year teachers' union contract signed with AFT Local 604.
- Energy-efficient lighting installed across 20 school sites.
- East Aurora Road Academy opens new site on Indian Trail rd.
- 59 rooftop air-conditioning units installed district-wide.

2019-2020

- New heating and air conditioning installed at seven elementary schools.
- 1:1 electronic devices provided district-wide for PreK-12 students.
- Laptops, iPads, and hotspots distributed to all students.
- New Administration District Office and Professional Development Center with Board Room completed.
- Early Childhood Center and adjacent building purchased on Indian Trail Road.
- 13 of 17 schools achieve Commendable Status from the State of Illinois.

2020-2021

- District-wide Dual Language Program launched for Kindergarten.
- Heating and air conditioning added to one middle and two elementary schools.
- Gonzalez Child Center expanded: six high-tech classrooms, pet therapy room, yoga studio, cafeteria, gymnasium, and courtyard.

2021-2022

- Adventures Program opens alongside a new Administrative Center at the former Copley Center Campus.
- HVAC upgrades planned for five additional buildings.
- Dual Language Program expanded to include 1st grade.

2022-2023

- Five HVAC upgrades completed, totaling 15 buildings in four years.
- Dual Language Program expanded district-wide through 2nd grade.
- Tax levy reduced to a record-low 3.89%.
- Groundbreaking for the Resilience Education Center.

2023-2024

- Dual Language Program expanded district-wide through 3rd grade.
- Updated playgrounds at five elementary schools.
- Anticipated tax levy reduced further to 3.62%.
- Resilience Education Center open in March.
- New HVAC systems installed in 18 schools

2024-2025

- Dual Language Program expanded district-wide through 4th grade.
- Continued upgrading of playgrounds throughout the Elementary Schools
- Tax Abatement Equal to \$4,947,150 for 2024 Tax Levy Year
- Purchased Mitchell & Indian Trail for future site of Career Technical Center

9

Number of consecutive years of 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

11

Number of consecutive years the EASD131 tax rate has been reduced - record low rates while continuing to expand opportunities.



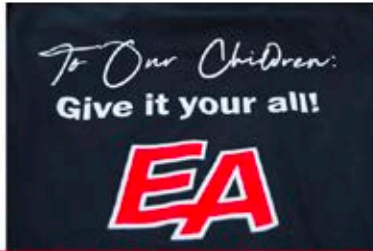
EASD 131: Where Families and Education Come Together

At EASD 131, we are committed to providing our parents with the engagement, resources, and encouragement they need throughout their child's educational journey. This school year, we've already hosted several major events, including our Back-to-School Fair, Family Fall Festival, Parent University, Las Posadas, and Discovery Day at the Resilience Education Center. These events featured motivational speakers, special performances by local artists and students, festive food, games, educational activities, community resources, and memorable gifts such as backpacks, school supplies, autographed books, and more. Each event was truly a day to remember for our families.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to all EASD 131 staff and community partners for making these incredible opportunities possible for our students and families. To engage even more and share ideas, we invite parents/guardians to join our parent advisory groups that include the Bilingual Parent Advisory Council (BPAC), African American Parent Association (AAPA), Parent Ambassador Group and East Aurora Dads.

To learn more visit www.d131.org/parent-groups.





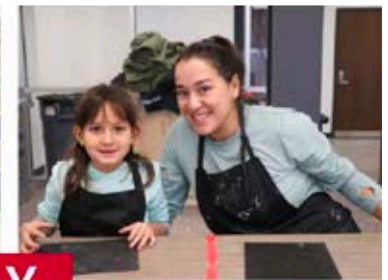
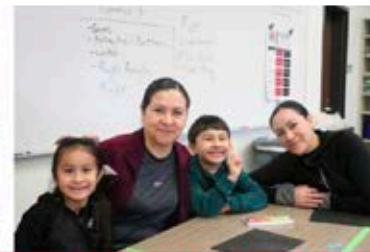
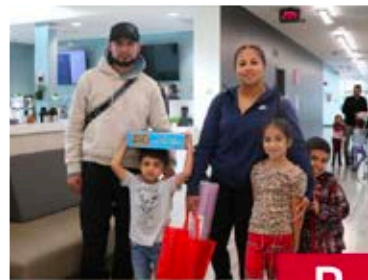
PARENT UNIVERSITY



LAS POSADAS



R.E.C. DISCOVERY DAY







CBS News Spotlight Visits EASD 131

CBS Morning and Evening News crews recently visited Bardwell Elementary School and East Aurora High School to feature East Aurora School District 131 in their School Spotlight segment!

News anchor Melissa Perlman and videographer Aaron Cooper began their visit by interviewing EASD 131 Superintendent Dr. Jennifer Norrell, who highlighted the dedication of our principals in celebration of Principal Appreciation Month. Ines Sem, principal of Johnson Elementary School, was also interviewed about her school's achievements and its recognition as an Exemplary School by the Illinois State Board of Education.

Perlman enjoyed meeting our EA Paws Comfort Dogs and their handlers. Board of Education President Annette Johnson and Associate Superintendent for School Leadership Jalitza Martinez spoke about the EA Paws program, designed to create safe spaces and provide comfort for students in the classroom.

The spotlight continued with an interview with Dr. Rita Guzman, Executive Director of Language Acquisition & Early Learning. Perlman also visited our Dual Language classroom, where students

proudly showcased their impressive bilingual skills. East Aurora is the only school district in Illinois with a district-wide Kindergarten-through-Fourth-Grade program offering daily instruction in both English and Spanish across all subjects.

For the evening news, CBS Meteorologist Albert Ramon and videographer Jeff Langan visited East Aurora High School and were thrilled by the experience! They featured the East Aurora High School Marching Band, Cheer Team, Dance Team, Varsity Football Team, NJROTC (which recently passed its Annual Military Inspection with Honors), the DECA store, and the Culinary Iron Paw Kitchen.

After wrapping up their live segments, Ramon and Langan couldn't resist staying to enjoy some of the delicious food prepared by our talented culinary students.

Go Tomcats!



EASD 131 Shines at Aurora's State of Education Address

The City of Aurora hosted its annual State of Education Address on September 18, where Dual Language students from Benavides STEAM Academy and Bardwell Elementary School delivered an inspiring presentation. The event also celebrated Cynthia Martinez, a social studies teacher at Fred Rodgers Magnet Academy and Kane County's Educator of the Year, for her outstanding achievements.

Our English-dominant students wowed the audience with their impressive Spanish-speaking skills—a testament to the success of D131's unique, district-wide Dual Language program for Kindergarten through 4th grade, the only one of its kind in Illinois. The district was also recognized for leading the state in the number of Seal of Biliteracy and Commendation awards earned by students. In addition, the event spotlighted D131's innovative Resilience Education Center, which continues to pave the way for student success.

The celebrations didn't end there! On September 23, District 131 proudly honored our Dual Language students once again at the school board meeting. They delivered another remarkable presentation that left board members and attendees amazed by their talent and dedication.

Congratulations to Cynthia Martinez and our exceptional students—Celi' Ancheta, Kashlynn Banks, Haddie Woods, Nori M. Rubio, Mykenly Donatien, and Jared Y. Morales Perez. A heartfelt thank you to our EASD 131 leaders and teachers for their unwavering commitment to empowering students to reach their full potential!







EASD 131 SCHOOLS Go Above & Beyond

At EASD 131, there's always so much to celebrate academically! Our schools continue to go above and beyond in helping students achieve their full potential. Here are some recent achievements that make us proud:

Fred Rodgers Magnet Academy Recognized Nationally

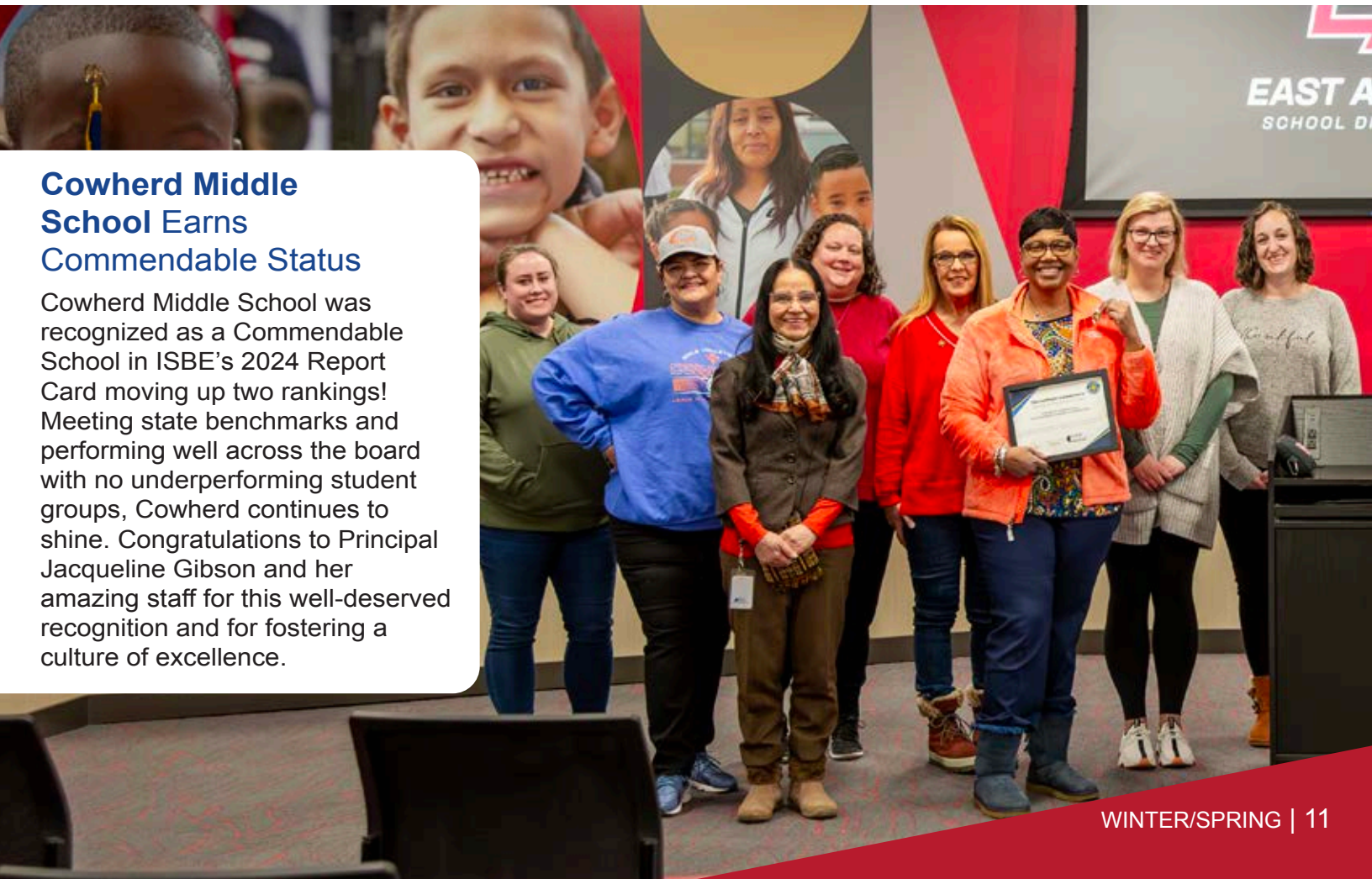
U.S. News & World Report has named Fred Rodgers Magnet Academy one of the Best Middle Schools in the Nation! Schools earn this recognition based on their performance on state-required tests, graduation rates, and how well they prepare students for high school. The top-ranked schools excel in educating all students, and Fred Rodgers Magnet Academy is no exception. Congratulations to Principal Brian Valek, along with the dedicated teachers and staff, for this incredible accomplishment. We're proud of the impact you're making in our district!





Johnson Elementary School: Exemplary Achievement

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) has named Johnson Elementary School an Exemplary School in the 2024 Report Card—ranking in the top 3% of schools across Illinois with an overall performance score of 92.62%! This is the second year they have received this designation, which is a remarkable achievement and a testament to their ongoing commitment to excellence. Congratulations to Principal Ines Sem and the entire team of building leaders, teachers, and staff for raising the bar year after year and making Johnson Elementary a shining example of success.



Cowherd Middle School Earns Commendable Status

Cowherd Middle School was recognized as a Commendable School in ISBE's 2024 Report Card moving up two rankings! Meeting state benchmarks and performing well across the board with no underperforming student groups, Cowherd continues to shine. Congratulations to Principal Jacqueline Gibson and her amazing staff for this well-deserved recognition and for fostering a culture of excellence.



Keeping Students Focused & Achieving New Heights



East Aurora School District 131 is making big strides in student success—both in and out of the classroom. East Aurora High School is celebrating a record-breaking 90% graduation rate!

The school also leads the Western and Southwest Suburbs in Commendation and Bilingual Seals earned in 2024. In addition, EAHS is ranked third in the nation for the number of students (95) taking the AP Seminar: English 10 exam and achieved its highest number of AP Scholars to date with 103 students receiving national designations. Additionally, the successful launch of block scheduling for the 2024-2025 school year has further enhanced learning opportunities for students.

Also, this school year, new cell phone procedures were introduced for all 8th-grade students at the district's middle schools and for all students at East Aurora High School. With research showing that unrestricted phone use can distract from learning and contribute to social and emotional challenges, the district implemented secure “cell phone condos” in every classroom. High school students still have access to their phones during passing periods and lunch, striking a balance between connectivity and focused learning.

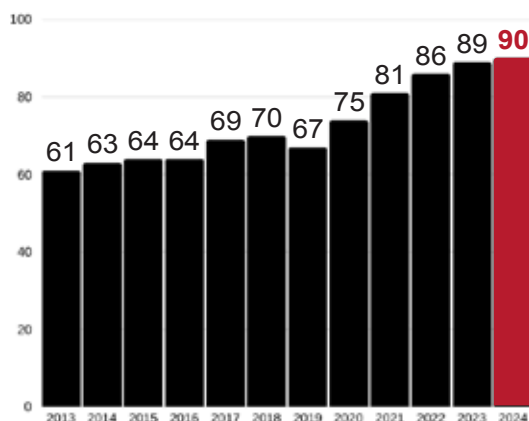
The impact has been overwhelmingly positive. “We weren’t sure how students would react,” shared Superintendent Dr. Jennifer Norrell, “but we’ve been pleased to see many embracing and even appreciating the change.” East Aurora High School Principal Jennifer Mitchell added, “Cell phones are a huge part of daily life, and we truly appreciate our students’ cooperation. These changes have already made a noticeable difference in the classroom.”

By creating an environment that prioritizes both focus and achievement, East Aurora School District 131 is empowering students to reach new heights. Congratulations to Principal Jennifer Mitchell and the entire EAHS team for their outstanding accomplishments!

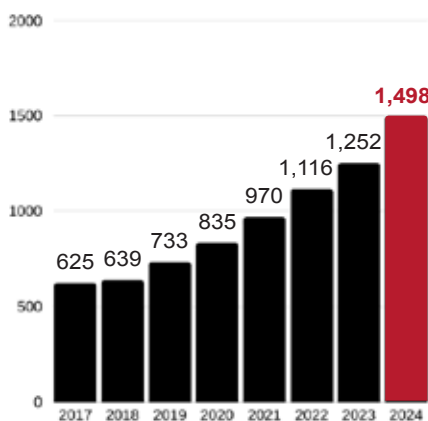




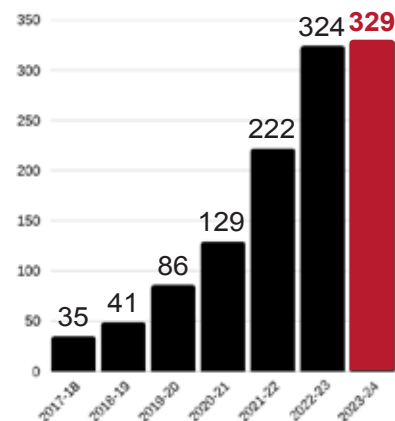
Graduation Rate



Students Taking Early College Courses



Total Seal of Biliteracy/ Commendations In-Building



The East Aurora Resilience Education Center (R.E.C.) Opens for the 2024-2025 School Year

District 131 recently opened the Resilience Education Center, a state-of-the-art space dedicated to supporting student and family well-being through mental health services, social wellness programs, and industry-level courses that prepare students for college and careers.

Designed with student input, the center was built around one key question: What activities would make you put down your phone? Their answers shaped its programs, making it a truly student-driven space.

High school students are taking advanced electives in art, music production,

broadcast journalism, dance, yoga, gaming, coding, and culinary arts. Broadcast Technology students will soon launch a Tomcat Network series highlighting EASD 131 events, students, and staff. Recently, families gathered for Discovery Day, enjoying free activities like dance fitness, yoga, artistic adventures, and cookie decorating, thanks to the incredible staff and teachers.

To learn more about the Resilience Education Center and explore the exciting activities available for students and families, visit <https://resilience.d131.org/>.





From Classroom to Career: The Career Technical Center Opens Pathways to Success

In 2023, with the purchase of property on Mitchell Road and Indian Trail, the East Aurora School District 131 school board made the strategic decision to establish a new S.T.E.M. Campus known as the Career Technical Center (CTC). Located next to our Early Childhood Center, this innovative facility will not only expand our current educational programs but also provide the resources to launch new career pathway opportunities for students and families.

Superintendent, Dr. Jennifer Norrell articulated designs for the blueprints following months of work with high school staff on preparations for a comprehensive plan. The plan addresses both student and community success through use of this Center both during the day and with evening training opportunities. Plans included multi-year data points on student career interests and industry employment trends. “We excitedly met with Career and Technical Education staff, industry partners- including Kathy Gilmore and the Valley Industrial Association members, students and parents all in an effort to determine the best direction in planning programs reflective of the greatest need for our area,” expressed Dr. Jennifer Norrell.



District leadership has worked with architects on the design and functionality of the future Career Technical Center and are excited to build upon the recent success the district has had in launching new state-of-the-art facilities. “On the heels of the success of the Resilience Education Center, which focuses on liberal arts, mental health services, and community engagement,” shared Steve A. Megazzini, EASD 131 Assistant Superintendent of Operations, “The CTC will be an incredible state of the art facility that will offer students a chance to experience STEM classes and hands on career and technology offerings in the district.”



The exciting new career pathways the Career Technical Center will offer include:

- Manufacturing
- Aviation Mechanics
- Cybersecurity
- Hydroponics
- Health Occupations (such as Certified Nursing Assistant, Emergency Medical Technician, and Licensed Practical Nurse)
- Automation Technology

Each pathway is carefully designed to align with industry needs, ensuring students receive hands-on training and real-world experience to prepare them for future careers.

“The creation of the S.T.E.M. Campus will have a positive, lasting impact on student career development,” said Asa Gordon, Director of Middle and Secondary College and Career Readiness. “It will not only support and enhance the current Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs offered at East Aurora but also enable us to provide innovative programming that isn’t currently feasible at 500 Tomcat Lane.

Dr. Jennifer Norrell stated, “This forward-thinking approach reflects the Board of Education’s commitment to fostering student and community-wide success in their chosen fields.” The establishment of the CTC Campus marks a significant milestone in the district’s efforts to promote career readiness and equip students with the skills needed to excel in a rapidly changing job market. The groundbreaking ceremony for the CTC Campus is scheduled for 2026, with plans to open the center to students in late 2027.





- Career Cluster
(Pathway)
 - Programs

East Aurora High School Programming

2024 & Beyond
College and Career for ALL

East Aurora High School

Liberal Arts Campus

- Freshman Academy
- Arts, A/V Technology & Communications
(Visual Arts Pathway)
 - Drawing and Painting
 - Sculpture
 - Ceramics
 - Digital Photography
- Arts, A/V Technology & Communications
(Performing Arts Pathway)
 - Instrumental Music
 - Choral Music
 - Dramatic Arts
- Education & Training
(Teaching/Training Pathway)
 - 1+1+2 Teacher Program
- Finance
(Accounting Pathway)
 - Accounting
- Hospitality & Tourism
(Restaurants & Food/Beverage Services Pathway)
 - Cooking & Culinary Management Program
- Human Services
(Early Childhood Development & Services Pathway)
 - Child Care Provider/Assistant
- Marketing
(Marketing Management Pathway)
 - Marketing
 - INCubator.edu Entrepreneurship

Career Technical Center

S.T.E.M. Campus

- Health Science
(Therapeutic Services Pathway)
 - Health Occupations– CNA
 - Health Occupations - EMT
 - Health Occupations – LPN
- Information Technology (Programming & Software Development Pathway)
 - Gaming and Design Operations
 - Cybersecurity
 - Web Page & Digital/Multimedia
- Manufacturing
(Manufacturing Production Process Development Pathway)
 - NIMS Credential
 - College Advanced CNC Manufacturing
 - Cabinet Making and Millwork
 - Welding
 - Construction Trades
 - Industrial Electronics
 - Automation Technology
- Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics
(Engineering & Technology Pathway)
 - Drafting and Design Technology
- Transportation, Distribution & Logistics
(Facility & Mobile Equipment Maintenance Pathway)
 - Aircraft Mechanic and Service Technician
 - Automobile Mechanic and Service Technician

Resilience Center

Arts & Wellness Campus

- Arts, A/V Technology & Communications
(Journalism & Broadcasting Pathway)
 - Broadcast Technology
- Arts, A/V Technology & Communications
(A/V Technology & Film Pathway)
 - Podcasting
 - Music Production
- Arts, A/V Technology & Communications
(Performing Arts Pathway)
 - Dance
 - Yoga
- Hospitality & Tourism (Restaurants & Food/Beverage Services Pathway)
 - Contemporary and Global Pastry Arts
- Information Technology (Programming & Software Development Pathway)
 - Gaming and Design Operations Programming

East Aurora Extension

Excel Campus

- Alternative Academic Programs
 - DREAMSS
 - Pathways
 - RSSP
- East Aurora Excel Academy (EA²)
 - Diploma Completion
 - Workforce Development
 - Waubensee Works
 - Early College Program @ Waubensee Community College



- Grupos de Carreras
(Camino)
 - Programas

Programación de East Aurora High School

2024 y Más Allá

Universidad y Carrera Profesional para TODOS

East Aurora High School

Campus de Artes Liberales

Academia para Estudiantes de Primer Año

- **Artes, Tecnología Audiovisual y Comunicaciones**
(Camino a las Artes Visuales)
 - Dibujo y pintura
 - Escultura
 - Cerámica
 - Fotografía Digital
- **Artes, Tecnología A/V y Comunicaciones**
(Camino a las Artes Escénicas)
 - Música Instrumental
 - Música coral
 - Arte Dramático
- **Educación y Formación**
(Camino a la Enseñanza/Formación)
 - Programa 1+1+2 para Maestros
- **Finanzas**
(Camino a la Contaduría)
 - Contaduría
- **Hotelería y Turismo**
(Camino a los Servicios de Restaurantes y Alimentos/Bebidas)
 - Programa de cocina y gestión culinaria
- **Servicios Humanos**
(Camino al Desarrollo y Servicios de la Primera Infancia)
 - Proveedor/Asistente de cuidado infantil
- **Marketing**
(Camino a la Gestión de Marketing)
 - Marketing
 - Emprendimiento INCubator.edu

Career Technical Center

Campus S.T.E.M.

- **Ciencias de la Salud**
(Camino a los Servicios Terapéuticos)
 - Ocupaciones de Salud—CNA
 - Ocupaciones de Salud - EMT
 - Ocupaciones de Salud—LPN
- **Tecnología de la Información**
(Camino a la programación y Desarrollo de Software)
 - Operaciones de Juego y Diseño
 - Ciberseguridad
 - Página Web y Digital/Multimedia
- **Fabricación**
(Camino al Desarrollo del Proceso de Producción Manufacturera)
 - Credencial NIMS
 - Universidad de Fabricación CNC Avanzada
 - Ebanistería y Carpintería
 - Soldadura
 - Oficios de la Construcción
 - Electrónica Industrial
 - Tecnología de Automatización
- **Ciencia, Tecnología, Ingeniería y Matemáticas**
(Camino a la Ingeniería y Tecnología)
 - Tecnología de Redacción y Diseño
- **Transporte, Distribución y Logística**
(Camino al Mantenimiento de Instalaciones y Equipos Móviles)
 - Técnico de Servicio y Mecánico de Aeronaves
 - Técnico de Servicio y mecánico de automóviles

Resilience Center

Campus de Arte y Bienestar

- **Artes, tecnología audiovisual y comunicaciones**
(Camino al Periodismo y Radiodifusión)
 - Tecnología de Transmisión
- **Artes, tecnología audiovisual y comunicaciones**
(Camino a la Tecnología A/V y Cinematografía)
 - Podcasting
 - Producción Musical
- **Artes, Tecnología audiovisual y Comunicaciones**
(Camino a las Artes Escénicas)
 - Danza
 - Yoga
- **Hospitalidad y Turismo**
(Camino a los Servicios de Restaurantes y Alimentos/Bebidas)
 - Artes de Pastelería Contemporánea y Global
- **Tecnología de la Información**
(Camino a la programación y Desarrollo de Software)
 - Programación de Operaciones de Juego y Diseño

East Aurora Extension

Campus Excel

- **Programas Académicos Alternativos**
 - DREAMSS
 - Pathways
 - RSSP
- **Excel Academy de East Aurora (EA²)**
 - Obtención de Diplomas
 - Desarrollo de la Fuerza Laboral
 - Trabajos de Waubensee
 - Programa de Universidad Temprana en Waubensee Community College

East Aurora Board of Education 131

The Board of Education Celebrates Another Year of Achievements



Ms. Annette Johnson, President
Serving Since 2009



Mr. Bruce Schubert, Secretary
Serving Since 2017



Ms. Theodia Gillespie
Serving Since 2024



Mr. Judd Lofchie
Serving Since 2022



Mr. Saul Olivas
Serving Since 2022



Mr. Juan Sifuentes Jr.
Serving Since 2019



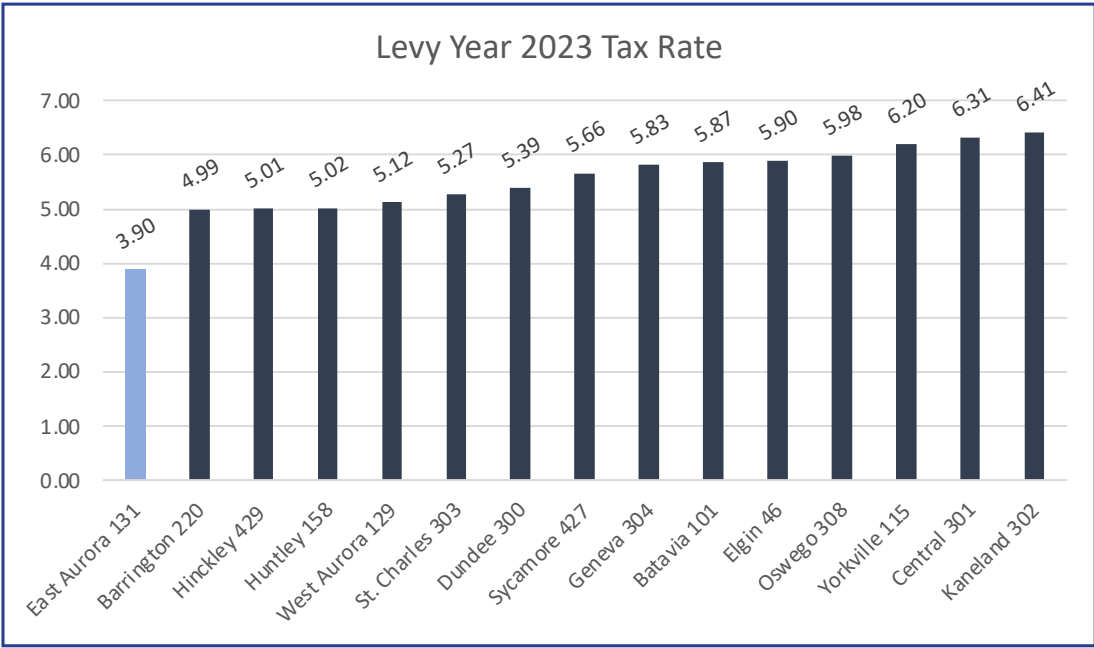
Mr. Kevin Martinez
Student Board Member
2024-2025 School Year



Ms. Karina Villagran
Student Board Member
2024-2025 School Year

Accountability in Action: Board Achieves Historic Low Tax Levy

The district's finances remain exceptionally strong. This year, the district's third-party auditing team from Crowe LLP, led by partner Christine Torres, presented the Board of Education with the cleanest audit in recent history—featuring no material findings. For the first time in over 15 years, all of the schools' student activity accounts also received outstanding marks. The Board of Education has worked diligently to maintain the lowest tax rate in Kane County. This year's historically low tax levy rate could even reduce tax costs for many of our constituents.



Representing the Student Voice: Martinez & Villagran Take the Lead

East Aurora High School seniors Kevin Martinez and Karina Villagran were sworn in as Student Board Members during the October 21, 2024, School Board Meeting. They will serve as representatives of the students to the board and of the board to the students until the end of their senior year.

Martinez currently serves as a Cohort Leader in the Upward Bound TRIO Program and is actively involved in several organizations, including the National Honor Society, Student Council, the Aurora Youth Council (AYC), and the Youth Engagement in Philanthropy group (YEP). “I am writing to enthusiastically recommend Kevin Martinez, a standout student in the Class of 2025. As the current valedictorian, Kevin consistently demonstrates exceptional academic ability and a deep commitment to his education. His intellectual curiosity and strong work ethic have earned him the respect of his peers and teachers,” expressed Ms. Jennifer Mitchell, Principal of East Aurora High School.

Villagran is equally accomplished, serving as a co-host of the Women in STEAM Panel and participating in various organizations, including Student Council, the National Honor Society, the Science National Honor Society, and the Student Athlete Society. She is also a Student Ambassador, a JV Soccer Manager, and a member of the City of Aurora’s Mayor’s Office – Harvard Bloomberg Youth Advisory Board. “Karina embodies what it means to ‘reach your full potential’ in all aspects of her life—as a student, an athlete, and a member of her community. I have no doubt that she will represent our student body well as a Student Board Representative and go on to achieve her postsecondary goals,” shared Tracy Warwick, Counselor at East Aurora High School.