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COMMUNITY UNIT SCHOOL DISTRICT

401

ELMWOOD PARK
EDUCATION AT ITS FINEST



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AP Program Expands

High school students have the opportunity to study and learn at a college level through the rigorous AP (Advanced Placement) academic program. Thousands of two- and four-year colleges and universities grant credit, placement, or both for qualifying AP Exam scores. This year, Elmwood Park High School students have three new courses to choose from, increasing the school's AP offerings to 14.

EPHS student enrollment in AP courses has increased by 296% since the 2010-11 school year, and course offerings have more than doubled. EPHS students are averaging a "3" in nearly all of the courses, a score accepted by many colleges and universities for college credit.

The new courses, geared to seniors, are: AP Chemistry, AP Physics 2, and AP U.S. Government and Politics. Approximately 87 students are enrolled in at least one of these new AP courses.

AP Chemistry is an excellent course for students with an interest in health and medical careers. Students who may

want to pursue engineering are benefitting from AP Physics 2, and AP U.S. Government and Politics is the honors equivalent of the school's new Civics course. Student interest and teacher recommendation determine the course topics.

The additional AP courses are Language and Composition, Literature and Composition, Human Geography, World History, U.S. History, U.S. Government and Politics, Physics 1, Physics 2, Chemistry, Statistics, and Calculus AB.

Over 25% of all EPHS students are enrolled in at least one AP course. It is school policy that every student enrolled in an AP course takes the AP exam in May. This school year, students are anticipated to take 453 exams.

EPHS educators are exploring the inclusion of AP Art History, Microeconomics, and Macroeconomics. New courses will be driven by student interest and teacher recommendation.

AP courses are a great opportunity for EPHS students that provide an advantage toward college and careers.

Elmwood Park High School students are enjoying the new, state-of-the-art science wing, a beautiful and practical building addition that will serve students for many years to come.



(Left): The exterior of the new science wing.

(Above): Students work in a bright classroom in the new science wing.

Band Program Grows

The EPHS Band Program continues to grow. This year, 71 students in grades 9-12 are learning to play instruments and perform in front of an audience, up from 48 students in 2008. They have the opportunity to participate in a variety of ensembles, including concert band, marching band, basketball/pep band, percussion ensemble, jazz band, and the pit orchestra. The ensembles meet and perform both during, and outside of, the school day. The school also has a band camp, where students rehearse all day, every day, for a week before the school year begins.

The ensembles perform at a variety of events, including school concerts, football games, local parades, basketball games, and pep ensembles. The marching band also engages in two competitions a year.

Most of the EPHS musicians joined the band program when they were fifth grade students at Elmwood School or John Mills School. They often go on to participate in the Elm Middle School Band Program, where they perform three concerts a year. The school's eighth grade musicians also unite with the EPHS band to perform at a football game and at a basketball game.

Kyle Rhoades, the district's secondary band director, remarked, "The District 401 Band Program would not be successful without the support of the administration and the band parents. When the band needed new marching uniforms, the Board of Education voted in favor of funding them. We are grateful for their support."

New Dean of Students



Dean Edgar Rivera

EPHS students with last names that begin with the letters M-Z have a new dean of students this year, **Edgar Rivera**. He is working

closely with Dean Karen Katolick to ensure that school rules regarding all discipline and attendance polices are correctly interpreted. Additionally, he provides counseling, works with staff on educational improvement, is involved in the coordination, implementation, and supervision of co-curricular activities, and is responsible for many other duties that involve students, staff, and parents.

Mr. Rivera has worked in education for eight years, six as a teacher, and two as an administrator. He has taught PE and health, and served as dean of students for grades 9-12. He earned a BS in Education from Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, and an

MS in Educational Leadership from Concordia University, River Forest. He is a recipient of the Mid-American Conference Commissioner's Award for Academic Excellence (2007), which recognizes the academic accomplishments of college student athletes.

A soccer aficionado, Mr. Rivera is both an accomplished coach and professional player. His coaching experience is vast, and includes soccer camps, travel soccer, high school, and university teams. He was the director of coaching of the Chicago Storm team soccer camps. He aspires to be an athletic director. You can find him working out at the gym every morning at 4:30 a.m.!

He credits his parents, who came to the U.S. to pursue a better life, as the motivation for his success.

"EPHS is a fantastic school filled with excellent teachers, students, and administrators. It is a wonderful place to call my 'home away from home,' and I plan on being part of the EPHS family for a long time," Mr. Rivera stated.

Teachers Gain Insight Through Autism Training

During the summer, teachers from EPHS and other area high schools came together for a weeklong seminar to learn strategies for teaching autistic students. The seminar was presented by Easter Seals and led by teacher trainers from several suburban high schools. Typically, only special education teachers attend this training. However, the trainers were thrilled that many regular education teachers participated and benefited from this hands-on workshop, because it is likely that most teachers will have autistic students one day.

Each day, teachers worked in small groups with one of four autistic students. On the Autism Spectrum, the students ranged from high functioning to non-verbal. The teachers learned a variety of techniques that helped each student engage in learning.

Several parents of autistic children provided educators with valuable information by giving candid insights into what works and what doesn't work in interacting with their children. Teachers also had the opportunity to observe peer volunteers as they worked, and played, with the students.

Elizabeth Bantel, Italian teacher and Student Council advisor, was among the EPHS teachers who attended the training. She stated: "This seminar was an eye opening experience. I did not have much interaction with autistic students prior to this training. At the start of the week, I was sad seeing these kids and thinking of their disabilities, but I quickly learned that I was viewing it all wrong. They were extremely capable and able to do so much, but sometimes just didn't have the tools they needed to express themselves. By the end of the week, I was absolutely blown away by how successful they were with each and every task given to them. They were all bright, funny and talented students!

"We learned that every student with autism can be successful in the classroom given the right 'system.' As educators, it is our job to know and use these systems every time we work with autistic students, so they have the support they need to be successful."

Middle School Selected for School Climate Project

ELM Middle School is in the second year of a two-year partnership to transform school climate and reduce bias-based bullying. It is one of only five Illinois schools selected to participate in this project, a partnership with *Communities Aligning for School Transformation* (CAST), which is a collaboration between *Prevent School Violence Illinois* (PSVI), and the *National School Climate Center* (NSCC). The goal of the CAST Project is for PSVI and NSCC to learn along with the school community how to most effectively prevent bias-based bullying, and to promote even safer, more supportive, engaging, middle school communities.

The school also received a \$2,500 CAST grant to implement the project, and is aided in the project by representatives from CAST. On the first day of the school year, CAST Project Director Tim Tasker gave a presentation to students on bullying and conflict.

A Climate Team of teachers, students and parents meet once a month to

coordinate aspects of the project, under the direction of Elm Middle School Principal Dr. Kathleen Porreca, and Assistant Principal Cody Huisman, the team leader. Last year, climate surveys were administered to students, parents, and teachers, to determine the project's priorities. The results indicated that the school climate is already very positive. However, there is always room for improvement.

The Climate Team carries out projects such as CAST professional teacher development, and decides which of the CAST training modules they want to use, depending on the school's needs.

Through their exploratory class, Elm Middle School students are participating in a "Positivity Task Force." Students use this opportunity to brainstorm ideas to further positivity and joy in the school. The first group of students to complete the three-week-long exploratory collected bubble wrap to give to everyone in the school to use as a stress reducer, and also made inspirational signage. Each group of students will develop a unique project.

Climate surveys will be repeated this year to determine if the CAST project is making a difference in the school culture. The results will be reported back to the program's sponsors.

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Elm Middle School Principal Dr. Kathleen Porreca (R), received a \$2,500 CAST grant to implement the Climate Project at the school.

Teacher Receives Fellowship



History teacher Matthew Weldon with several of his students.

An EPHS teacher is benefitting from an honor he achieved in 2013. U.S. History Teacher Matthew Weldon was one of two Illinois teachers who received a James Madison Memorial Fellowship, presented to educators who "desire to become outstanding teachers of the American Constitution at the secondary school level." The grant pays for furthering education in political science or U.S. history.

He applied for the fellowship by completing an online application. District 401 administrators also wrote "stellar letters of recommendation" for him.

Mr. Weldon is using the fellowship to pursue a second Master's degree, which will be in U.S. history. The program requires that Fellows spend one month in Washington, DC, studying intensely at Georgetown. The study trip also includes hands-on experiences at historic sites, and daily classroom sessions taught by experts. Mr. Weldon completed the DC requirement in July.

He is attending class one night at week at Roosevelt University, Chicago, toward the degree.

In addition to teaching two sections of junior level AP U.S. history, Mr. Weldon also teaches one section of a split elective, political science and psychology.

He is grateful for the many people who have helped him achieve his goals, including District 401 administrators, his parents, and his wife, who, when he was in DC, "had to take care of three kids five years and younger by herself, and constantly picks up the slack when I am not capable."



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Theater Department News

On October 30 and 31, the EPHS Theater Department presented two one-act plays, "Harry's Hotter at Twilight," a spoof of both the Harry Potter and Twilight series, and "Bang Bang You're Dead," a serious production that focused on bullying and school violence. Forty students participated, on stage, and behind the scenes. The award-winning Theater Department continues to present high quality productions.

An EPHS student has received a significant honor. The Illinois High School Theater Festival (IHSTF), the oldest and largest high school theater festival in the country, selected EPHS senior **Nathaniel Rodriguez** to be a member of the stage tech crew for its production of RENT. The play will take place in January at Illinois State University, Bloomington-Normal. He has been participating in monthly rehearsals and in set construction sessions for the play for several months.

IHSTF selected Nathaniel for this honor from several hundred applicants, based on an interview, his knowledge of the technical aspects of theater, his written essay, and teacher/director recommendations. Nathaniel has participated in every EPHS theater production since his freshman year. EPHS Theater Director Noah Pligge, himself a two-time member of IHSTF productions, stated, "Nathaniel truly maintains the aptitude and dedication necessary for being chosen for this honor."

The EPHS Theater Department's next performance, a spring musical, will take place March 18 - 20, 2016. Tickets will be \$5; there is no charge for students or for senior citizens.

Middle School Selected for School Climate Project

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"We are honored to be one of just five middle schools in Illinois invited to participate in this project," Principal Porreca remarked. "The professional development our educators are receiving has been invaluable. The CAST team is great to work with, and they bring so much expertise to our school. It is highly beneficial to be able to interact with the other CAST schools at the cluster meetings so that we can share ideas and experiences. We all learn from each other."

According to *Prevent School Violence Illinois*, using the CAST frameworks, any school that is interested in transforming its climate can do so. And ultimately that is the point: better school climates improve the health, safety, and well being of all members of their communities.