King Elementary > West Middle School > Auburn Academy

PGE District 205

Gifted News

A Newsletter from Parents for Gifted Education (PGE) • District 205

Why Gifted?

MORE ADVANCED PLACEMENT (AP) CLASSES MEAN GREATER LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Auburn offers 19 AP classes, while Guilford offers 8, and Boylan, 6.

Parents of a current Academy student gave the following insight as to why they chose Auburn, "When we looked ahead to the senior year, we realized we would run out of classes at Guilford. The opportunity to take more Advanced Placement (AP) classes makes the senior year more valuable for Academy students." Auburn offers the following AP classes, some of which are core courses required to graduate with the Academy Seal; some of the others are offered on a rotating schedule:

AP Biology
AP Calculus AB
AP Calculus BC
AP Chemistry
AP Computer Science AB
AP Macroeconomics
AP Microeconomics
AP English Literature
AP English Language
AP US Government and Politics
AP Physics Electricity and Magnetism
AP Physics Mechanical
AP European History
AP U.S. History
AP World History
AP Advanced JAVA Programming

Three new AP classes will be offered in 04-05:

AP Statistics
AP Psychology
AP Music Theory

After taking an AP class, students have the option of participating in the national testing program. Students can score a 1-5. Most colleges offer credit for the class if the student receives a 3-5 on the exam. Last year **84% of the 240 AP exams taken by Auburn students were passed with scores of a 3 or higher**. Some students graduate from the Academy with enough credits to have the option of entering college as a sophomore, substantially reducing college expenses. In addition to the extensive list of AP classes, Auburn also offers other upper level courses such as Microbiology and Organic Chemistry, which are not available at any other public high school in District 205.

ACADEMY STUDENTS LEARN MORE

Some families place such a high priority on class rank and GPA that they choose to transfer out of the gifted program rather than face the academic rigor of the Academy. Despite consistently higher standardized Academy test scores and the U.S. News and World Report suggestion that "…from the beginning of your high school career, you should strive to take challenging classes, even at the risk of lower grades," the lure of short term recognition over life-long learning persists.

National Merit Semi-finalists by school

Year*	Auburn	Boylan	Guilford	Keith	Lutheran	Others
2003-04	7	3	0	1	0	0
2002-03	8	0	1	1	0	1
2000-01	9	2	0	1	2	1
1999-00	5	4	1	0	0	0
1998-99	4	1	0	2	0	0
1997-98	3	3	3	0	1	0
1995-96	10	1	1	0	0	1
1994-95	11	3	1	1	0	2
TOTAL	57	17	7	6	3	5

*Records not available for 2001-02 or 1996-97 school years.

The 2004 Academy class has continued the tradition of producing *the most* National Merit Semi-finalists – 7 – National Achievement Scholars – 1 – and Commended Students – 11 – of *any* Rockford School (public or private). Recognition is based on scores on the PSAT. National Merit Semifinalists score in the top ½ % of students in the nation. That can translate to college tuition in the form of merit-based college scholarships. The average composite SAT scores for Academy students (not all students elect to take this exam) in 2003 was 1390, with one perfect score of 1600.

In 2002, the average ACT for Academy students (28.5, with one perfect 36) was one of the *top five schools in the nation.*

In 2003, the average ACT for Academy students (27.4) ranked in the *top one percent in the nation*. ACT changed from ordered rankings to percentage rankings beginning with the class of 2003.

In 2003, Auburn was chosen as *one of only 10 schools in the nation* selected to participate in a study on how schools prepare students for success in college coursework based on the strong ACT scores earned in English, math, and science, and its diverse student population.

Further evidence as to the advanced scholarship of Auburn's gifted students can be found in the gifted report card, soon to be available at the Parent Information Center. It outlines all the demographics and test scores for gifted students in the Academy and West Middle School.

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Why Gifted? (cont'd)

(Continued from page 1)

ACADEMY STAFF DEDICATED TO ACHIEVEMENT

When asked why they chose the Academy for their second child while their first was attending Boylan, parent Gina Boettcher cited one reason being, "…the exceptional teaching staff." Other parents enthusiastically referred to the "collegial atmosphere" between students and faculty as beneficial to their child's maturation as well as learning. Academy teachers engage and interact with students in a more adult manner than that of the traditional high school student-teacher relationship. During last year's North Central Accreditation, the review team was told by students that they felt "teachers cared about them." According to Academy faculty, "elevated expectations by teachers of their students parallel a spirit of experimentation and risk demanded by gifted students of their teachers." The consortium working with the district on site-based management told our parents that small learning communities, such as the Academy, result in stronger relationships between staff and students, as well as significantly higher test scores. "Academy students then emerge with skills of searching out concepts, not just facts; of analyzing, not just memorizing; of creating new ideas, not just understanding old ones; of evaluating the great cognitive achievements of cultures by questioning the answers, not merely by answering the questions."

According to 2001 Academy graduate David Sydney, "The Academy teachers helped me to lose my preconceived notions about the world. They opened the world to me, politically, socially, and educationally. I was able, with their guidance, to find myself and what I wanted to do. There was never a limit on how much material, resources or time given to me. There was not an option to fail…I was challenged to do my best."

MORE ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS

Only Auburn offers the following career classes. All are available to Academy students.

CAPA- Academy students make up *one third* of the students enrolled in the Creative and Performing Arts program. The program develops talents in art, dance, keyboard, instrumental and vocal music, visual and graphic arts, and theatre.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY- Cisco certification, Microsoft A+ certification in computer diagnostics and repair, INET certification for Internet systems and web design, and Introduction to Technology are offered.

ROTC- Students in this program develop leadership skills, receive valuable non-military training and qualify for financial support for college.

MEDIA COMMUNICATIONS- Broadcast Media and Media Technology offer students hands-on experience in television news reporting and production. Auburn is the only school in the district to have a complete recording studio and sound lab to create morning news broadcasts (Knightline) and other productions.

AVIATION- Aerospace and the Fundamentals of Flight prepare students to take the FAA written exam for private pilots and to enter the Airframe and Power-Plant certification program at Rock Valley College.

AUBURN OFFERS THE MOST OPPORTUNITIES FOR ZERO HOUR

Last year, the Board of Education voted to fund an additional teaching equivalent for CAPA and Academy classes during the zero hour at Auburn. This resulted in 5 additional classes available over the 5 initially offered at all the high schools. Students with a zero hour are able to take more electives and AP classes (Guilford offered no upper level classes in their zero hour). With these options, an Academy student's high school career becomes a more diversified experience, a definite plus when colleges are choosing between candidates with similar qualifications.

THE STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

The parent of the Boylan student who chose the Academy for her second child related, "The single most important factor in choosing Auburn was peer support. My daughter is in class with kids who are like her - prepared, willing and anxious to learn." This attitude lends itself to development of the collegial student-staff relationships discussed earlier. When students are in school with the goal of learning, there are fewer discipline problems. Peer pressure and the challenging curriculum help keep classes focused and students engaged.

Another family with students at both Auburn and Guilford stated their family enjoyed "the variety of kids at Auburn." She elucidated by saying, "kids at Auburn are more accepting and appreciative of the other students for who they are." Students appreciate the variety of opportunities available. As one student quipped, "At Auburn, I'm not excluded from participating in any activity from lack of experience. I can try anything I want without feeling pressure from the other kids about not being good enough or cool enough."

Jon Bennett, a junior who transferred into the Academy from Boylan, had many reasons for making the change and is quite content with his decision. Initially, he made his choice because "Auburn had more class options, including a deeper breadth of AP and upper-level courses, and had a student body that seemed focused on classes and constructive use of time." He also said "it was difficult to get into AP classes at Boylan due to the highly limited number of sections." Once at Auburn, he also discovered "nicer teachers who were more respectful of the students, and a much more challenging curriculum." He's also been able to take physics his junior year – an option only for Boylan seniors – and take Microbiology and Organic Chemistry.

When considering educational opportunities in Rockford, families have to look at the Academy as a long term, life-enriching experience. Although rigorous coursework may require a higher investment of effort, the payoff is that students learn more, score better on standardized tests and are better prepared for college.☆

West PTO Revived!

Thanks to Joy Schneider for editing the November Issue of the West Warrior Word which every West family should have received by now. Deadline for submitting articles and/or calendar information to joy4re1@aol.com for the January 2004 Issue is January 9, 2004. Gross income to date for the Fall Fundraiser tops $23,000. A Thank You Ice Cream Party for students selling 12 items or more is scheduled for Tuesday, December 16th. Peg DeRango is chairing a Holiday Teacher Appreciation Breakfast at West on Friday, December 19th. If you are able to help with Teacher Appreciation Events, please call Peg at 398.2051. Sandy Schwartz is chairing a fun "West Nite" for 6, 7 and 8th graders to be scheduled mid-January to celebrate the end of the first semester. If you can help with this event, please call Sandy at 874.4363. Interested parents are invited to attend a January 20th training to learn more about participating in the many facets of Site-Based Management. The next PTO meeting is scheduled for Monday, December 8th at 7:00 in the West Library. All are invited. For more information about West's PTO call Tom Zuba at 395.1337.

Auburn Athletics "Looks to the Future"

The future of Auburn athletic programs glows with promise and potential. This year, Terry Niedziecki was brought on board as the new Athletic Director. Terry comes to Auburn after serving in the same post for nine years at Harlem High School. He is a Certified Athletic Administrator (CAA) and spent this past year serving as the President of the Illinois Athletic Directors Association; we welcome him, his knowledge, and his experience to Auburn! He is brimming with ideas, enthusiasm, and a vision of Auburn Athletics as once again becoming a source of pride for our school.

The Athletic Department plans to implement many new programs in the near future, some starting this year, others being developed to commence at a later date. With the help of the beloved coaching staff and a selection of our student athletes, we have formed committees to work on the following topics, all to be implemented in the 2004-5 school year:

- ◊ Coaches' Handbook
- ◊ Character Building Program
- ◊ Preseason Meeting (to be held before each sports season)
- ◊ Sportsmanship Program
- ◊ Banquet Awards Program
- ◊ "Knights of the Round Table" (Student Athletic Advisory Committee)

Some of these topics are long standing Auburn traditions we plan on updating or reviving; others are new ideas we are pleased to have injected into our athletic programs. These new and improved programs will help to establish the future of Auburn athletics as both positive and promising. The ultimate goal is to improve the success rate in our sports programs, with the efforts made by students and staff playing key roles.

Of course success in athletics needs to be measured in more ways than winning games. Take, for example, the upswing in the boys soccer program. At the fall sports banquet, coach Elias Vicente declared, "This group of boys came together as a team tighter than any other team I've coached, including club soccer." The boys felt they had practiced hard, and attributed their development and success to their "awesome coach." The best sign for the future is Elias' plan to return next year and continue the work begun with his team.

Auburn students also enjoy supporting the successful athletes representing our school. Sophomore Stephanie Baliga, a Girls Cross Country superstar, has demonstrated incredible athletic prowess of which we are exceedingly proud! She won the NIC-9 Conference and the IHSA Regional Championship meets this fall, and went on to place 22nd in the State Finals. This finish earned Stephanie "All State" status for the second consecutive year!

Making the Auburn athletic program competitive and successful takes the combined efforts of the Athletic Department, coaches, student athletes, their families, and the fans. The best gauge for the success of any sports programs is not always found in team records, but in team camaraderie. Student athletes' feelings of accomplishment demonstrate that being surrounded by teammates who compete because of a passion for the sport or love for the game can be the most satiating feeling of all. While the increasing success of Auburn athletics shows great potential, we are lucky enough to already have built the necessary foundation for continued success in the Knight pride shown by our student athletes.

PGE Web Site: pge205.org

Parents for Gifted Education now has a web site. We hope that it can provide timely information regarding news and information for the gifted program. The site can be accessed at the address: pge205.org (Enter this address in the address bar of your web browser.) Some browsers may require you to enter the full address: http://pge205.org/ (The address is not case sensitive.) Currently, the site has printable and web page versions of the newsletter and information from Terry Mohaupt regarding state and national activities involving gifted education. Please let us know what other information would be of value.

High School Advocacy Committee (HAC)

HAC is working with the District 205 to determine a plan for zero hour for the 2004-05 school year. HAC has proposed:

1. Let all students take a seventh class who want the extra course and who meet the eligibility requirement of passing six classes.
2. Plan a staffing budget for the zero hour, but do not pick specific courses. Let the Master Schedulers at each high school fill the schedules.

The committee has funded and tabulated the results of a student survey given to all the 8th –11th graders in the district. This survey determined next year, up to 1656 students want and would be eligible for a zero hour class. Based on figures from the district, HAC determined the cost for staffing a zero hour for those 1656 students would be $607,200, just double this year's cost of $308,000.

In their student survey, they asked what classes students would like to take during a zero hour. Then, during discussions with master schedulers from two high schools, they were informed which classes are offered *can be determined* by the classes for which students registered

In a meeting with the finance department and the interim superintendent, the committee was told bussing could be provided for all zero hour students. HAC has surveyed public and private schools from the surrounding area as well as some Chicago suburbs to assess the competition's course and credit opportunities. District 205 has the only local schools offering less than seven hours a day while New Trier High School in a northern suburb of Chicago offers up to 9 class hours per day!

During November, HAC presented their research and requests to the board and it's committees. These presentations will take the place of the regularly scheduled meeting. The committee's third Tuesday at 7 PM meetings in the School Board room will resume in December. Meanwhile, HAC is asking parents and students interested in saving and even expanding the seventh hour to show their support at the November 25th and December 9th board meetings.

THE GIFTED ALLOCATION AT WORK

Out of the $235,000 the district budgeted to the gifted program, $175,897 pays for staffing. In addition to our psychologist, Ruth Harris, and her secretary, Henrietta Minst, Certified Staff work as test monitors during eligibility testing. The allocation also pays the salaries of support positions at Auburn, West and King. The following is a breakdown of the functions of these positions.

KING READING TEACHER- Ms Caccio

- ✓ Literacy Leader: As Literacy Leader, our reading teacher is the "expert" on the research and literature regarding reading. She works with staff to model reading techniques and incorporate "best practices" in our classrooms. Along with our Language Arts Action Team, the Literacy Leader develops Professional Development activities and then assesses the effectiveness of the initiatives.
- ✓ Reading Teacher: In this role, she provides "pull out" services to those students in first and second grade who are reading at or below grade level. In these classes, she incorporates the techniques considered "best practice."
- ✓ Reading Specialist: In this role, she works with individual students or small groups of students in third through fifth grades who are reading below grade level.

WEST TUTORS

Three tutors provide an average of six periods of student tutorial services within school hours each school day.

- ⇒**Sally Bennett-**Tutors English and study skills three hours daily, with groups of sixth grade students
- ⇒**Skip Gilbert-** Tutors areas of determined need with seventh and eighth grade students
- ⇒**Gary Boettner-** Tutors math at all grade levels for one hour each day
- ⇒Classroom teachers tutor after school groups where deemed advisable

AUBURN CURRICULUM ADVISORS

Whatever issues arise with the Academy and CAPA students, staff, and parents, the advisor is involved.

ACADEMY- Kathy Heisel

- ◊ Schedule and facilitate Academy staff meetings at least once a month/more when needed
- ◊ Coordinate Freshman Advisory Team meetings with counselors (who then schedule meetings with parents)
- ◊ Send letters to parents whose students are struggling and need intervention Plan and coordinate Academy/CAPA
- ◊ Recruitment visit days in the fall
- ◊ Plan visit days to 8th graders at West with current Academy students (panel discussion of Academy program)
- ◊ Coordinate budget requests/requisitions Plan/coordinate details for field trips (Creative Writing Festival, NAT, college visits, etc.)
- ◊ Work with school administration
- ◊ Development of the Curriculum guide

CAPA- Greg Gyllsdorff

- ∗ Coordinate meetings and CAPA calendar, with the CAPA staff
- ∗ CAPA recruitment, auditions, and follow up
- ∗ Coordinate budget requests and requisitions
- ∗ Development, implementation, oversight and revision of the strategic plan
- ∗ Coordinates school visit days with CAPA students
- ∗ Coordinates site visits to other schools with CAPA programs to develop and improve Auburn's program
- ∗ Develop and Deliver the Recruitment Show. Includes visits to all the Middle Schools to develop interest.
- ∗ Assist with development of the testing brochure.

KUDOS

National Merit Semifinalists (Top 0.5% of PSAT scores nationally) for the 2004 graduating class were are all students in the Academy and include: **Laura Bland, Chad Casarotto, Adam Heinemann, Amanda Makulec, Shani Schechler, Karl Sturm and Mike White.**

A National Achievement Scholar (Outstanding African American Student) is Academy student **Shadonna Woods**.

Commended Students (top 5% of PSAT scores nationally) by the National Merit Program totaled 11 Academy students who are: **Katherine Evans, Melanie Green, Emily Jakobsen, Sara Milner, Abigail Mohaupt, Hillary Mohaupt, Amanda Otto, Matthew Spoden, Amanda Walsh, Jamie Wilt and Michael Zimmerman.**

Stephanie Baliga NIC 9 Conference Girls Cross Country Champion, **All State** Girls Cross Country

All District Jazz Band 1st band: **Eric Huber** selected as ***1st chair*** alto sax, **Erik Anderson** (piano), **Jay Jarrett** (trombone), **Satya Modi** (percussion). 2nd band: **Jason Simon** (percussion), **Alison Goldthorpe** (trombone)

Amanda Makulec was selected as a Ward Leader for Freedom's Answer, a nationwide, non-profit, non-partisan youth voter turnout organization.

Zachary Beach placed ***1st*** and **J.P.Roman** 20th in the National Youth Action Chess Championship during which Auburn placed 4th in K-12, West 13th in K-9, King 15th in K-3, and 9th in K-6.

Hillary Mohaupt placed ***1st*** in drama and **Catherine Palemeno *1st*** in poetry at the University of Wisconsin Whitewater Creative Writing Festival.

STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR GIFTED

The PGE Executive Board has met with the gifted administrators to develop long range planning for the program. The board was concerned about the lack of a coordinator/director, continued funding of the program, matriculation of class curriculum across schools, and budget allocations. The group agreed on two priorities: the development of a strategic plan and the pursuit of grant money. Jan Jones, director of special education, recently retired from the district, will lead a group of parents and staff through a two day strategic planning session on the 12th and 13th of January. All schools will be represented with staff and parents. If you would like to serve on the strategic planning committee and can commit to the scheduled dates, please contact Ruth Harris by phone 966-3182 or email at HarrisR@rps205.com

Gifted Allocation

As many of you know, after the state budget was released and categorical funding of the gifted program was replaced by a block grant, our School Board voted to continue funding the program at the same level. At the July 21st Board Meeting when the vote was taken, PGE Board expressed appreciation for the continued support, but disappointment over the loss of the gifted advisor at Auburn and the fact that a requested increase in funding was defeated. Yet the parents agreed that in light of the financial crisis, each group had to share a part in reducing district expenditures.

During recent meetings with the PGE Board and Administrators, it came to the group's attention that District 205 did not use the correct figures when calculating our allocation. They began with a figure $3,430 below last year's grant. They cut the secretary from 12 to 10 months, but failed to inform Human Resources. So she worked and we paid her for those months, despite having had the $5,380 removed from our allocation. They replaced the 0.4 Auburn curriculum advisor's salary with a differential and failed to include the $846 in benefits which must be paid as part of the differentials.

The sum of these errors is **$9656**. This lost money was targeted for Advanced Placement Training for Academy Teachers and matriculation of curriculum between sites. Without it, there is no staff development. At the November 25th and December 9th board meetings, the Board of Education will be asked to make good on their promise to fund the program at the same level as last year. It would be beneficial to have students and parents from the program present, and especially so if one or two were to speak to the need for this money during the time for public comments at the beginning of the board meeting. To do that, just fill out a card found in the back of the board room (Room 207, 201 South Madison St.) and turn it in to the secretary sitting at the table no later than 6:50 PM.

If you have any questions, contact Jude Makulec, 633-6818.

CALENDAR DECEMBER 2003 / JANUARY 2004	
Dec 1	PGE Meeting at West MS Library, 6:30 business, 7:15 program "Why West?"
Dec 2	Auburn Choice Open House 7-8 PM "A Knight To Remember"
Dec 3	Auburn Staff Talent Show 7:00 PM
Dec 6	CAPA Auditions 9:00AM-Noon
Dec 8	West PTO 7:00 PM
Dec 8	Auburn Band and Orchestra Concert, 6:30-8:30 PM at Cherryvale Mall
Dec 9	CAPA Auditions 3:45-5:15 PM
Dec 9	School Board votes on Gifted Allocation, speakers must turn in card by 6:50 PM
Dec 16	West Winter Concert, 7:00 PM
Dec 22- Jan 2	No School, Winter Break
Jan 8	West Choice Open House, 6:30-7:30 PM
Jan 12 and 13	Gifted Strategic Planning
Jan 13 and 15	West Orientation and Tours, 9-10:30 AM

PARENTS FOR GIFTED EDUCATION

2302 Trillium Trail
Rockford, IL 61102

Email: PGE@rps205.com

Nov 25 and Dec 9 Board of Education
7 PM, Room 207, 201 S. Madison St.
Introduction (11/25) and vote (12/9) for
Full funding of the gifted program and
Expanded Zero Hour
Students and Parent's needed to
Demonstrate your support!

Dec 1 PGE Meeting: "WHY WEST?"
West MS Library
6:30 PM Business
7:15 PM Program titled "Why choose West?"
Curriculum Presentation
Q & A with Staff
Students welcome!

Dec 2 Auburn Choice Open House 7-8 PM
"A Knight To Remember"

PGE ON THE WEB: PGE205.ORG

HELP RESTORE STATE GIFTED FUNDING AND GIFTED LANGUAGE IN THE SCHOOL CODE

As you are probably aware, categorical funding for gifted education was taken out of this year's state budget and all references to gifted were removed from the school code. We need your help to restore gifted funding and language. **The proposed Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) FY05 draft budget contains a line item for gifted education, but we must convince ISBE and the legislature that there is strong support and concern for this throughout the state. YOUR voice MUST be heard.**

This year, ISBE is accepting comments via email regarding the FY05 budget, instead of at public hearings. So, here's the action plan to restore gifted funds and language:

1. Create an email and send it to: budgets@isbe.net
2. List Gifted Education as the subject.
3. Emails should be short and specific. For example, I support the gifted education budget line item at the 5% ADA funding level of $500 per student. District 205 currently funds gifted at $213 per student in the program, over half of which goes to testing to propagate the program. Compare that to the over $4000spent on each student enrolled in the district's bilingual program (From figures given by Pete Keffer of the Finance Department at a recent P.E.A.C.E. Forum on District Finances). Gifted children deserve and need our attention to reach their potential. If you have personal testimony you may want to include it as well.

The ISBE website now has the FY05 Budget posted at the following site in case you would like to review it: http://www.isbe.state.il.us/budget/default.htm.

It is critical that we get the message out to educators, parents, and any others who advocate for gifted/talented education in the state. Let's be sure that gifted is restored to the budget and to the school code.

Please share this message with all of your contacts who would join our efforts to reinstate gifted funding into the FY05 budget and gifted language into the school code.

Directory Update

Directories will be distributed to students in the schools around the first week of Dec. All King students (King PTO funded), plus West and Auburn Families listed in the directory, will receive a copy. Additional directories can be requested before December 1 by calling Jill @ 636-5199. There will be a $5 charge to help defray printing costs.