King Elementary > West Middle School > Auburn Academy

PGE District 205

Gifted News

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

CHOOSING GIFTED FOR MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL

More Educational Opportunities
Some families are under the misconception that gifted education does not provide more learning opportunities, rather, that teachers just make students do more homework. Yet one of the foremost reasons students move into the program at middle school is because the depth of the gifted class work results in better preparation for high school course work. To achieve this depth, our students are given a substantial, but manageable, level of homework. Gifted students also benefit from expanded course offerings.

For example, West is the only middle school offering algebra in seventh grade, geometry in eighth grade, a two year foreign language program that gives the student a year of high school credit upon entering Auburn, and hands on science labs. Auburn is the *only* district high school *currently running* (not just offered, but running) two years of calculus, five years of a foreign language, microbiology, organic chemistry and an AP physics class. Consider the depth of college level (Advanced Placement) classes if you need further proof that the students actually have more learning opportunities.

Compare the selection of AP classes at:

Auburn 18	**Boylan 5**
Guilford 8	**Lutheran 0**

Consider how the AP selection influenced one family's choosing Auburn; "When we looked ahead to the senior year, we realized we would run out of classes at Guilford." Jon Bennett, a transfer student from Boylan into the Academy, made the change initially because "Auburn had more class options, including a deeper breadth of AP and upper-level courses. It was difficult to get into AP classes at Boylan due to the highly limited number of sections. Physics is only offered to seniors, and they don't even offer microbiology or organic chemistry." After the transfer, Jon said he discovered Auburn had "a much more challenging curriculum than he experienced at Boylan."

Then Look at the AP Test Results
After taking an AP class, students have the option of participating in the national testing program. The scoring ranges between 1 and 5 on each test. Most colleges offer credit for the class if the student receives a 3, 4, or-5 on an exam. Some schools set per-student limits on the total number of credits they will apply.

In 2004, 83% of the 190 AP exams taken by Academy students were passed with a score of 3 or higher. This supports the fact that Auburn students aren't just taking the classes, they are learning the material. This is further supported by Academy student's performance on standardized testing.

Nationally Recognized ACT Performance
Average ACT scores for Academy students out of a possible 36:

2002 28.5 2003 27.4 2004 28.2

Each year, these scores place us in the **top one percent of high schools in the nation!** In 2002, the last year ACT Corporation ordered schools by ranking, Auburn Academy was listed **as one of the top five schools in the nation!** In 2003, Auburn was chosen as **one of only 10 schools in the nation** selected to participate in a study on how schools with diverse populations prepare students for success in college coursework based on the strong ACT scores earned in English, math and science.

Triple the Number of National Merit Semi-Finalists of ANY Rockford School
Junior year, students voluntarily take the PSAT exam. The top scoring ½% of students in the nation are named semi-finalists.

National Merit Semi-finalists by school

Year	Auburn	Boylan	Guilford	Keith	Lutheran	Others
2004-05	3	2	0	0	0	2
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	60	19	7	6	3	7

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

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Choosing Gifted (cont'd)

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This distinction is even more impressive considering the cut off score is decided on a per state basis, and Illinois students historically score higher than students from other states (at last ranking, three of the top five scoring high schools in the nation were in Illinois). Semi-finalists then go on to compete for a position as a finalist.

Over the last decade, Auburn has produced over 60 National Merit Semi-Finalists (see chart), the school with the next highest number had 17. And the names of many of the non-Auburn students achieving this distinction are recognizable as former students in the elementary and middle school gifted classes. Last year, **all seven of the Auburn semi-finalists went on to be named finalists**, guaranteeing each a merit-based college scholarship. In addition, National Merit Finalists automatically receive offers for FULL SCHOLOARSHIPS from universities around the country. Speaking of college tuitions…

Money in Your Pocket

AP classes can save parents tens of thousands of dollars in tuition when students begin their college career with anywhere up to three semesters of college credit.

Colleges with semester rotations generally require 30 hours of credit to be considered a sophomore. Here is a sampling of the credits which some of Auburn's recent graduates had the day they began their college careers: University of Wisconsin, Madison- 38, Carlton College- 36, Miami University- 25, University of Iowa- 15, University of Arkansas- 41, Stanford University-(trimester credit)- 50.

In addition to the monetary savings from beginning school with sophomore status, students experience the benefit of registering earlier for their classes, often beating out other incoming freshman (who lack credits) for hard to get spaces in classes that fill early. Students who miss entry into critical required classes their freshman year are often those faced with the five year plan as a result of waiting another year to take classes only offered during the fall semester.

The Almighty 4.0

When a .university chooses between a student with a GPA of 4.0 and a 25 ACT, and another with a 3.75 GPA and a 33 ACT, is there really any question who they believe is the stronger candidate?

While many students succumb to the lure of short term recognition over life-long learning, no one should overestimate the power of being a valedictorian in exchange for pursuing a demanding curriculum. US News and World Report suggests, "…from the beginning of your high school career, you should strive to take challenging classes, even at the risk of lower grades." Admission officers from around the country continually recognize Auburn Academy as one of the outstanding college preparatory programs IN THE COUNTRY due to the rigor of its curriculum.

Students and parents alike have asked, 'what is the benefit of taking harder classes?' The obvious response is STUDENTS LEARN MORE! For those who need a more tangible reward, Dr. Thompson has stated that he expects the district at some point in the future to resume weighted grades, but only for AP classes.

Parent's Perspective

One family said they chose West because the rest of the middle schools in the district were "black holes, where you put your student in and three years later they emerge physically more mature, but lacking the foundation needed to be successful in high school." Martha Hayes, chief instructional officer for the district, has repeatedly identified the district traditional middle school classes as falling short in preparing students for their high school careers. Those complaints are seldom heard from parents and teachers of graduates of the gifted program at West.

West parents are enthusiastic to have their children able to take both a foreign language and band (197 students are currently enrolled in band!). In addition to concert band and orchestra, there is a voluntary Jazz band meeting twice weekly for an hour before school begins. West also has an extensive selection of sports and extracurricular activities. West's first ever scholastic bowl team, comprised of students from all three grade levels of the gifted program, thrilled everyone by winning the state tournament last spring. These are all possible due to the dedication of the staff to developing the "whole student." And as a site based school, West parents work with these same teachers to provide input into the operation of the school, including participation in the interviews for new staff.

As for the Academy, when asked why they chose this program for their second child while another was attending Boylan, the parent cited "…the exceptional teaching staff." Other parents enthusiastically refer to the "collegial atmosphere" between students and faculty as a benefit to their child's maturation as well as learning. Academy teachers engage and interact with students in a more adult relationship than typical 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.**

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Choosing Gifted (cont'd)

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The Student Perspective

One child who chose to move from Eisenhower to West between sixth and seventh grades, based his decision, in part, on the opportunity for gifted students to perform their experiments in science labs instead of watching the teacher demonstrate the experiments to the students. Another student who had not attended the elementary gifted program said she was tired of being called "dictionary" by classmates. Both students had siblings attending other middle schools, but as one parent stated, "I am trying to meet the needs of each of my children. If one had asthma I wouldn't give both of them medication."

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." The mom 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 said once at Auburn, he found "…a student body that seemed focused on classes and constructive use of time" and "nicer teachers who were more respectful of the students."

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.

RPS 205 Slashes Gifted Funding

At the start of the 2004-05 school year, the finance department informed Ruth (gifted psychologist/coordinator), the schools, and PGE, that other than Ruth's salary, there were NO FUNDS allocated in this year's district budget for the gifted program. After repeated meetings with Dr. Thompson (superintendent), PGE turned to the board of education (BOE) to determine what had happened to the money.

At the October 26th board meeting, Tom Hoffman (director of finance) reported to Dr. Thompson and the board that the only reduction to last year's gifted budget was the clerical position. This had been part of the $16 million reductions the BOE voted for in February 2004.

The miscommunication regarding the funding was just that, a miscommunication. The new administration understood the loss of the categorical grant as a loss of funds, but the district continued to receive the money as part of a block grant, and our BOE voted in July 2003 to continue to fund the program at the level of the categorical grant.

Please take a moment to thank board members for their continued support of the program.

Congratulations Academy National Merit Semi-Finalists

The only students in the Rockford Public School system honored as National Merit Semi-Finalists, scoring in the top ½% nationally on the PSAT, are all students in the Academy. They include: Kelly Rockwell, Matthew Strong and Shuo Zhang. In addition, Auburn's Arthur Surratt achieved the distinction of being a National Achievement semifinalist, a competition specifically recognizing outstanding Black American high school students.

Commended Students (scoring over 200 of a possible 240 possible) include: Leah Asher, Zachary Beach, Sarah Bloomingdale, William Brooks, Lindsey Claeyssen, Tasha Lower, Marcus Lundgren, Jillian Olejnik, Yana Peysakhovich, Justin Saichek, Arpeet Shah, Arthur Surratt. In addition, Maia Mrkvicka was named as a honorable Mention semifinalist in the Hispanic program.

Good Luck to all as you continue in the competition to become a finalist!

PGE Applies for Grant

PGE worked with the district to apply for a $25,000 Inspiration Award offered by the College Board to schools demonstrating growth in the number of students taking AP exams and being accepted at 2 and 4 year colleges. Schools must have at least 40% of the students on free and reduced lunch to be eligible.

Connie Bland, parent of a 2004 graduate of the Academy, was generous enough to volunteer her time to format the data. The district's department of testing and research worked with Auburn counselor Tim Keating to gather the information Connie needed.

We will be notified by February if we advance to the next stage of the competition.

Changes In Store for Middle Schools in 05-06

At a recent West PTO meeting, Dr Thompson outlined his curriculum plan for ALL the middle schools. Currently, with the exception of Flinn, all middle school students have four core classes: English, Math, Science, and Social Studies. Unless the student has waived the class, PE is the fifth requirement. The sixth class is an elective of a student's choosing.

Hour of Day	Subject	
1	Math	*If a student tests out ouf reading, they can take a second yearlong elective such as a foreign language.* *Yearlong class offerings will be dependent on adequate enrollment. Students without PE still must have health as part of an elective.*
2	Social Studies	
3	Science	
4	Reading	
5	Language Arts	
6	Semester 1	Semester 2
	Physical Education (To Include Health)	Rotational Relative Arts (Music, Art, Computers, Drama etc)
	OR: Yearlong Band or Orchestra	

Next school year, the district will add an additional language arts class to the required core curriculum. This will take the place of the elective. Students will take a standardized test (Teranova), and 7th and 8th graders with scores over 65% will have the option of taking an elective instead of the language arts class. Language Arts will be mandatory for all 6th grade students, taking the place of humanities currently being offered. PGE parents have stressed the desire of our families for West to continue to offer the two year foreign language program which allows our students to enter Auburn with one credit for that language, and Dr. Thompson has said the district can support that request IF there are enough students to fill the classes.

Dr. Thompson has proposed having PE (with health) become a one semester class, paired with a semester rotating the fine arts, computers, and tech ed classes. 7th and 8th grade students who choose to take band instead of PE will receive the band class. Band students will, however, have to rotate the state health requirement into their schedule sometime during the year.

Drugs and Violence, A Program for Parents Organized by Academy Teachers

How fortunate we are to have a teaching staff concerned not only with the intellectual development of our students, but with their personal development as well. Based on those concerns, on November 9th the teachers organized a program with staff from Rosecrance and Cease Fire to enlighten parents regarding current trends in substance abuse and violence in our schools.

Christine Blake, from Rosecrance, reported that Teens who smoke are three times more likely than nonsmokers to use alcohol, eight times more likely to use marijuana, and 22 times more likely to use cocaine. While alcohol and marijuana are generally the drugs of choice, the use of heroin is escalating because it is more affordable.

The more subtle behavioral signs of alcohol or drug use include:
Secretive behaviors
Change in personality or baseline mood
Drop in grades
Dropping old friends and getting "new" friends, whom they often do not introduce to parents
Change in participation in extracurricular activities
Paraphernalia found, even if child claims it belongs "to a friend"

If you feel your family may be in need of intervention, call Rosecrance for a free assessment.

ILLINOIS ASSOCIATION FOR GIFTED CHILDREN

*Excerpt of message from **Sally Walker**, Executive Director, **IAGC**:* "The Illinois Association for Gifted Children (IAGC) is working very hard to restore funding and language in the school code for gifted students in Illinois. We are meeting with legislators to have them understand the necessity of gifted funding and mandate....In November several of us are going to Springfield during the veto session to touch base with key legislators and to meet with newly elected legislators. Hopefully we can get enough people to believe in our cause that we can get some legislation introduced and passed."

The IAGC encourages parents to email innovations@isbe.net to raise the issue of gifted programs in another venue. We need to take every opportunity to mention gifted education so the ISBE and the Governor cannot say gifted education wasn't an issue, wasn't mentioned, wasn't a concern. Also, please contact the ISBE at lessredtape@isbe.net to indicate that while you support less red tape, you do not support the elimination of ROEs or specific programs that address special needs students, including gifted children."

PGE Directories

A very sincere thank you to Lin Milius for her work in getting the PGE directories formatted, copied, and delivered to our PGE families during October. Lin inherited the job from Andy Tater, who had graciously done the job for many years. If you signed up to be in the directory and did not receive a copy, please give Lin a call at 229-3846. She would also appreciate any feedback which may be used to improve next year's directory.

Middle School Presentation

West staff was generous enough to share an evening with families contemplating testing and placement of their students in the middle school gifted program. Our thanks to Mr. Smith, Mr. Toldo, Mrs Borchers, Mrs. Bieschke, Mrs. Hamlett, Mr. Smith, Mr. Aures, Mrs. Russey, Mr. Taylor, and Mr. Dixon for sharing their time

CALENDAR DECEMBER 2004 — SPRING 2005	
Dec 2	West Grade 8— AM visit to Auburn
Dec 2	Auburn Choice Open House, 7 PM
Dec 2	PGE: Why Auburn Academy? Staff discusses Academy curriculum opportunities and outcomes at Auburn from 7:45-8:30 PM
Dec 3	K-Kids Candy Sale at King
Dec 4	CAPA Auditions, 9:00 am– Noon
Dec 7	CAPA Auditions, 3:45—5:15 PM
Dec 7	West Choice Open House, 6:30—8: 00 PM, Gifted Presentation at 7:15 PM
Dec 8	Pastries for Parents at King
Dec 9-10	CAPA One Acts, 6:30 PM
Dec 10	Popcorn Sale at King
Dec 13	Auburn Band Concert, 6:30-8:30 PM, Cherryvale Mall
Dec 14	West Band Concert, 7:00 PM
Dec 15	Auburn Holiday Chorus Concert, 7:30 PM
Dec 17	Class Parties at King
Dec 20-31	Winter Break, No School
January	PGE does not meet
Jan 14-17	No School
Feb 4	No School
Feb 7	PGE business meeting, 6:30 PM at West
Feb 21	No School
Mar 7	No School
Mar 14	PGE: Christine Blake from Rosecrance presents "Legal Highs in Your Medicine Cabinet and Easy Access to Drugs on the Internet" - 7:00 PM at West
Mar 25—April 1	Spring Break, No school
Apr 26	PGE: College Night, " The Search Process" 7:00 PM in the Auburn Auditorium, preceded by the Business Meeting at 6:30
May 2	PGE: Dr Thompson " The State of Gifted Education in RPS 205" , 7:00 PM at West, preceded by a 6:30 business meeting to elect new officers

King School Updates

Construction has begun on the Outdoor Facilities Project. The parking lot/play area on the south side of the school will be repaved, staff parking will be added on the east end of the parking lot, and a curved drive will be added on the Court Street side to safely allow for student drop off and pick up.

-Mrs. Freiburger's class is reading James and the Giant Peach. They are studying insects and arachnids, and have chosen the animal they wish to research for their research paper. They are investigating different insect/arachnid web sites in the computer lab, along with getting books from the library to help in their research. They are required to use at least three sources for their project.

-Mrs. Lindmark's class is studying Native Americans, including the Bering Strait migration of the Maya and Inca tribes.

-October brought The Stinky Cheese Man author Jon Scieszka and illustrator Lane Smith for a visit and book signing. November brings Tilli Schultze and Lorna Collier, authors of Tilli's Story: My Thoughts Are Free for an assembly and book signing. They will discuss World War II, and what it's like to be an author.

- Mrs. R. Christensen, Visual Arts Instructor, announces that the following King first quarter art students have their work on display at the Rockford Board of Education Office. The artwork is hung on the first floor entrance and will be up until the end of December. 1st Grade: Luke McGowan-Arnold, Hayley Gilligan, James Miller, Ruhi Patel, Valrie Lint, Brad Foster, Noah Bowman, Farah Farooqui. 2nd Grade: Karah Kurzawinski, Katerine Lundberg, Shawn Makulec, Noah Vronch, Emily Weigard. 4th Grade: Joe Johnson, Quavarius Reed, Alec Johnson, Emily Britton, Sydney Makela, Emily Flentge.

Students are doing a SUPER job of collecting Box Tops for Education!!! Keep up the good work!

PARENTS FOR GIFTED EDUCATION

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PGE ON THE WEB: PGE205.ORG

7G Student Needs Your Support

Rory Zuba, West seventh grader in the gifted program, underwent brain surgery on Monday, November 8th. Surgeons found a malignant tumor, resulting in the removal of Rory's left temporal lobe. During the surgery, Rory experienced a stroke.

Despite the invasive nature of the surgery, Rory has astounded the doctors and therapists with movement of his affected (right) limbs. They are also amazed with his reading and language comprehension, as well as the rapid return of his speech.

Rory will receive chemotherapy and radiation 5 days a week over the next 6 weeks while undergoing intensive rehabilitation at the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago. His dad has asked for everyone to ***"stay with us as our real journey begins… pray, dance, drum, send light, energy, love…all those things and more. Invite everyone you know to join us as we put one foot in front of the other."***

Rory has an incredible sense of humor. Perhaps your family can brighten his day with a joke or amusing incident from school. Cards can be mailed to**:**

Rory Zuba,
C/O Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago
345 E. Superior Street
Chicago, Illinois 60611

Or email Rory at: *megadorf1@aol.com*

A fund has been established at Alpine Bank to assist the family with medical expenses. Donations can be made at any Alpine Branch to the:

RORY ZUBA MEDICAL EXPENSE FUND

They can also be mailed to: Alpine Bank, 1700 N. Alpine Road, Rockford IL 61107.
A benefit is tentatively being planned for late January. If you can volunteer to help, please send e-mail to: Joy4re1@aol.com - in the subject line please write *Benefit for Rory.*

Tax Reform and School Funding Forum

Join with families all over the Rock River Valley to learn why over 80% of Illinois' schools are in financial distress and the legislation proposed to alleviate some of the red ink. Ralph Martire of the Center for Tax and Budget Accountability, researcher and designer of HB 750 will share the contents of the bill, how it will personally affect your taxes and how it will help the schools.

Illinois House Bill 750: Tax Reform and School Funding Forum
December 14, 2004 - 7:00 PM
Hononegah High School