

King Elementary > West Middle School > Auburn Academy



Gifted News

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

Ruth Harris Scholarship Fund

Our beloved Ruth, who was the gifted program psychologist since the program's inception in 1975, died unexpectedly in her home on February 11, 2005.

Ruth's official title of gifted psychologist initially revolved around her oversight of the testing for entry into the program. Since the departure of our director eight years ago, Ruth has also filled the role of director and liaison between staff, administration and parents. We will miss Ruth's quiet but persistent dedication to gifted children and this program.

In honor of Ruth, a Book Scholarship has been established. Members of the committee overseeing the development and distribution of the book scholarships include: Pam Wilson and Mary Makulec (PGE), Michele Beach and Rita Noneman (King), Linda Griffen and Anna Borchers (West), Ami Marshall and Carrie Floming (Auburn) and Alex Griffen (alumni).

Donations in Ruth's honor should be addressed to the **Ruth Harris Scholarship Fund** and mailed to 2302 Trillium Trail, Rockford, IL 61108.

Staff Appreciation Dinner May 20th

Your Contributions Appreciated!!!

The event is scheduled for Friday night, May 20th at the home of Jeff and Jude Makulec. We hope to give staff an inkling of how much they are appreciated by serving a buffet of food donated by our parents. Staff will be entertained by a strolling magician and music performed by former CAPA students, while they indulge in treats dipped in a chocolate fountain. If you are able to donate food, drink, money or assistance to ensure the success of this event, please contact Jill Saul @ 636-5199.

Gifted Staff Retiring

King: 2nd- Mrs. Lonsway, BD/LD Resource- Rita Nonneman
West: 6th- Mrs. Hamlett, 7th-Mrs. Deacon, 8th- Mrs. Anderson and Mr. Taylor

Auburn: Principal Kristen Wilson, Gifted Counselors- Mr. Keating and Mr. Meli

Science- Mr. Holstein and Mr. Keyser, Math- Mr. Pozzi, Social Studies-Mr. Okerlander

Here We Go Again

Two years ago, students realized the fruits of PGE's labors when the superintendent ordered the designation of dedicated Academy and CAPA counselors at Auburn. This concept had always encountered resistance from Auburn administration and counseling staff. Our families substantiated the need by the volume of incorrect information given our students from various counseling staff. To the counselor's deference, Auburn hosts four different programs with varied classes and requirements in one building. That is why our families wanted dedicated counselors who really understood the gifted child (currently, both gifted counselors have gifted endorsement) and the Academy and CAPA programs. Central administration concurred and Auburn was told to make the change. Now, at the request of Auburn administration, we are poised to *take a step backward* and resume having counselors *assigned alphabetically*. PGE is told downtown has given their support to this change.

Parents, if you concur with the need to continue with dedicated counselors, please take a moment to contact Dennis Thompson (966-3100, thompsd@rps205.com), Martha Hayes (966-6634, hayesm@rps205.com) and your board member (listed in the back of the gifted student directory). Ask why they are changing a practice which is in the best interest of our students, and appeal to keep what's working in place as new counselors are hired to replace our retirees. It's true this district has a large number of counseling positions to fill, and Auburn may need to hire someone without, but willing to pursue, gifted endorsement. There are candidates interested in working specifically with Academy and CAPA students, and recruitment and hiring need to target those individuals.

Interim Gifted Director

Many of you will recognize the name of the man who has generously come out of retirement to fill the void left when Ruth Harris died in January. Michael Golden has long been a friend and supporter of the program. He retired from his position as principal of West at the end of the last school year. He is working with downtown to develop a strategic plan for the program. Unfortunately, Mike won't be at the helm of gifted at the start of the next school year. Look for an announcement of Mike's replacement following Board of Education approval. We do know despite our efforts to get a full time Director of Gifted Education, Dr. Thompson has recommended maintaining the position as part time (.6).

Changes in Advanced Placement

Beginning in 2005, students enrolled in AP classes will be *required* to take the National College Board Exam for the subject of that class. This year's cost for each exam is \$82. Financial assistance will be available for students having limited ability to pay (as determined by the Free and Reduced Lunch Program). PGE has been told the testing is to ascertain all students are being taught the same level of material.

AP class grades will be on a weighted scale which awards quality points. An A will be worth 5 points instead of 4, a B 4 points instead of 3, etc. Grades from honors and Academy classes will *not* be weighted. Administration cites the need for consistency in the level of honors classes across the district before this will be considered. For now, the availability of a standardized test is expected to keep the curriculum consistent between schools offering the same AP classes.

Some parents and faculty have expressed their desire for all Academy classes to be graded on a weighted scale. At this point, central administration does not agree. A May meeting is scheduled with Martha Hayes to continue the discussion. Parents who would like to "weigh in" on the subject should contact Martha Hayes at hayesm@rps205.com and please copy pge@rps205.com

Administration and the Education Committee have proposed having the quality points awarded retroactively to all students who have taken and successfully completed an AP course in the Rockford Public Schools prior to the 2005/06 school year. They have also proposed students taking dual credit courses, designated as AP, be required to take the AP test for that subject if such a test is available. Finally, Dr. Thompson is considering reimbursement of test fees for students scoring 3, 4 or 5 (of a possible 5) points. There will be no Pass/Fail offered for AP classes.

7th Hour Advocacy Consortium

Co-chaired by parents Jeanne Westholder, Laura Powers and Cheryl Maggio, this group has kept the need for a seventh hour in the front of the board and the superintendent throughout much of this school year. You may have seen (and hopefully signed) their green petitions requesting the return of the 7th hour at the district's secondary schools which have been presented and read at a couple of board meetings.

In response, Dr. Thompson has maintained his stance that middle schools in this district do not need and will not get a seventh hour. However, he has reinstated a reduced (3 classes compared to 5 in 03-04) number of zero hour classes at the high schools. PGE has met with central administration and presented our request for additional zero hour allocations. That need is based on the number of special programs at Auburn as

well as the number of students desirous of the extra class. To substantiate Auburn's need for the additional allocations central administration has asked to see the numbers of students requesting zero hour. That is the reason students filled out a sheet regarding zero hour classes instead of simply signing up for one of three alternatives. Additionally, Auburn counselors and administrators will use the information on those sheets as a basis for deciding which zero hour classes will be offered.

PGE applauds the Auburn administration and their willingness to have student's input into this process. Student's at the other high schools were merely given a choice from a list of three classes, with priority for registration based on seniority and no work to prove the need for additional allocations. Thank you to Mr. Keating for tabulating all the information and Mike Golden for taking this issue up with the district on behalf of our students.

Middle School Curriculum

School district administration reports no consistency exists across the district in name, content or time spent instructing middle school students in English and Language Arts. In 2004, the percentage of district 8th graders meeting or exceeding standards on their ISAT scores were 50 for Reading and 40 for Writing. PGE has requested disaggregated scores for the students at West, which were not yet available to us at the time of this publication.

One of the district goals targets gains in reading comprehension and writing skills to increase student success in 9th grade. To that end, *all* 6th grade students will be required to take *both* an English and a Language Arts class. 6th grade gifted at West will continue to offer Language Arts as part of their core curriculum. All 7th and 8th grade students will have the opportunity to take a communications class in place of Language Arts *provided* they score high enough on a special standardized test administered at the end of the previous year (these have already been administered to current 6th and 7th graders). At West the communications classes include Spanish or a rotation (varied by grade level) of arts, publications, computers and tech ed. Students also have the option of waiving PE to take band. 8th graders waiving PE will be required to take health in

place of band during one quarter.

PGE has fielded concerns from our parents over having the publication classes (yearbook and newspaper) as a rotation instead of a full year class. There has also been parental discourse about making health part of the communication rotation instead of having students pulled from band for nine weeks. This would not be an option for students enrolled in a foreign language for their communication strand. The state of Illinois mandates a semester of health for all middle and high school students as one of their graduation requirements. We would be more comfortable pulling our children from band one day a week over the course of the school year for health, but administration feels it would be difficult to staff such a position since the teacher would have to travel to a different school and work with a different group of students each day of the week. One other option PGE has requested of administration is whether they will allow middle school students to take an accredited health class online as is currently acceptable for the high school requirement. As yet, downtown has not been able to commit an answer to that question, but if approved, 7th graders who took the class online over the summer would not have to be pulled out of any scheduled class. Brigham Young University currently offers both middle and high school health classes online and our district accepts their high school class.

State Gifted Legislation

There are two bills making their way through the legislature which restore language in the school code, which will once again require school districts provide educational services for gifted students. SB223 originated in the Senate and HB881 in the House. Both are alive, having passed their houses of origin.

Thanks to Phil Milsk (policy advisor), Renee Kosel and Miguel del Valle (bill sponsors), it looks promising for gifted language to be restored to the school code this year.

To be assured of successful passage, please take the opportunity to encourage your legislators to continue support of these bills with a quick (less than a minute!) phone call: (Senators) Brad Bursyniski 895-6318, Dave Syverson 987-7555, (House Representatives) Chuck Jefferson 987-7433, Ron Wait 547-7771, Dave Winters 282-0083; (Governor) Rod Blagojevich 800-642-3112.

State Gifted Legislation: Progress

Here is the most recent information regarding the progress of the Gifted Education Legislation, from Sally Walker (Illinois Association for Gifted Children Executive Director)

"SB 223 passed the full Senate Thursday (April 14), 57-0 and has moved over to the House. Rep. Mathias has picked up the bill. He gave it to Renee Kosel who will sponsor it in the House. This is how the process will now work. The House bill, HB 881, now comes over to the Senate. Sen. del Valle has already picked it up (signed on to be our chief sponsor) at Phil's request [Phil Milsk, IAGC Policy Advisor-tm]. It will go through the Senate committee process and will have a Senate floor vote, probably some time in May."

Keep up with all the latest information regarding state and local issues at pge205.org.

New Diploma for 2005!

The Scholar's Diploma was unanimously approved by the Board of Education on April 12 under Board Policy 6.30. Basically, it is a group of credit requirements between a traditional diploma and the Academy seal. It also requires at least one advanced placement (AP) course (1 year, 2 credits) during the student's high school career. All Academy students will be eligible for the scholar's diploma, and as such, will receive a "weighted" grade (or quality point) for AP classes as well as having a one time 5% adjustment to their GPA at the end of their sixth semester (a 3.0 would become a 3.15). Students must be in the Scholar's Diploma Program to be the class valedictorian, salutatorian and/or in the top 25 students. The diploma will be open to all ninth grade students entering high school in the fall of 2005/06. The decision to enter the Scholar's Program must be made prior to the first day of the second semester of a student's junior year.

KING

King in Bloom: Things will soon be blooming at King School with the addition of several gardens! Native American Plants is the theme and we invite everyone (alumni included) to stop and enjoy their progress. Gardens being planted include:

- ◇ K-Kids will be planting a memorial garden next to the memorial tree which was planted in remembrance of Paul Wixson's son.
- ◇ The first grade classes will plant a Butterfly Garden. This will go excellently with their unit on metamorphosis!
- ◇ A third garden will be planted by King's Girl Scout troop.

Smile! Spring pictures are Tuesday, May 3 and we are planning something new this year- a panoramic picture of the King student body! Look for copies of the panoramic picture which will be hung at various locations throughout King school.

Attendance: One of the district's goals is to cut down on absences and tardies across the district.

In May, King Staff and parents will be meeting to discuss District Attendance Policies and ways to help cut down on absences and tardies. We have one policy in place which has made a difference. All parents dropping off late students are asked to come into the building to sign them in. Your input would be appreciated, please bring your ideas and plan on attending!! Please contact Kathleen at King School 966-3370.

In Appreciation: A huge thank you to Kim DeBenedetto for all her hard work in organizing the April 14 King Fun Fair. Many parents, faculty, staff, King students, and West students helped make this night a success. The King PTO wishes to thank EVERYONE for the time and energy so kindly offered

K-Kids Club: Advisors Susan Armellani and Jannice Bubnack report that the K-Kids Club at King has expanded from 20 to 63 fourth and fifth grade members this year. Students have met every other Tuesday during lunch hour. Their first project was to collect items from all King families to fill care packages for the troops in Iraq. After the initial mailing, the club has periodically sent home notes asking for additional donations. They have shipped 16 packages (over 65 pounds) to Iraq!

Money for postage to ship the packages was raised with a candy sale held at the end of the school day on the first Friday of each month. Members have been responsible for maintaining inventory as well as direct sales. The students also operate a school store that is open every morning where they sell a variety of school supplies including pencils, paper, pens, glue and folders.

Some of the money raised will be used to "spruce up" the landscape around the school. Students are busy selecting native plants for a native garden which will also serve as a Memorial

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King cont'd

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to honor members of the King community who have passed away this year.

Severson Dells Forest Preserve hosted Mrs. Lindmark's and Mrs. Freiburger's students on a recent field trip which included a 2 hour guided interpretive hike of prairie, woodland, stream, pond, dells and meadow and a study of native and invasive plants in the preserve. Because the classes are studying Laura Ingalls Wilder's book *Little House in the Big Woods*, there was comparison and contrast of the current landscape to how it might have looked in the 1800's. These second grade classes further studied this time period during a visit to Midway Village which parents may have recognized in a letter to the Rockford Register Star by Mrs. Lindmark, extolling the attributes of their experience.

West

National Junior Honor Society: Seventh Graders inducted in NJHS in 2005 are: Perry Alekna, Alexa DeVita, Rachel Fox, Sally Leaf, Erika Lenox, Jacob Miller, Elizabeth Phelan, Eric Reyes, Laura Russey, Monette Tanuyan, Connor Thorne, Abbey Torrence, Sam White. This year West JHS students attended the national conference. They also volunteered their time at West homecoming, First Night, Kiwanis Pancake and Brat days, Park District special events, Empty Stocking Club and the Maple Syrup Festival. They volunteered time collecting treats and money to send to soldiers overseas, collecting money for WAVE, and provided seasonal gifts to teachers.

Builders Club: There is a core group of 20 students who have volunteered their time and basket donations at the two fundraisers hosted to raise money for the Rory Zuba Medical Expense Fund, worked monthly in 2005 at the Hunger Connection loading food, and performed the Lorax as well as assisting with crafts at the recent Earth Day Celebration at Rock Valley College.

Young Author's: Nine West students have won the Rockford Young Author's competition. They will head to Bloomington in May for the Young Author's Festival. Winners include: (6G) Stephanie Bennett, Daisy Brzezinska, James Reyes, Dharti Shah; (7G) Evan Matthews; (8G) Tiffany Brechlin, Kelsey Campbell, Charis Caputo, Lucas Enser.

Scholastic Bowl West's team debuted last spring with a state title. Having won their sectional, they are poised to compete to retain that title at the May 6th state competition, so long as they win their regional in Streator on May 2. If their performance at the Bloomington Invitational is any indication (they were 1st in a field of 43), the Warriors will prove hard to beat. Team members include Siva Sundaram (captain), Michael Chang, Kendall Coates, Taylor Chuchna, Conner Thorne, Thomas DalPra, Troy Makulec, Dane Rogers, Conner Thorne, Andrew.....and Alex..... They are coached by Mrs. Deacon, Mrs. Griffen and Mrs. Hamlett

In Loving Memory of Rory Zuba

Friend and classmate, Rory Zuba, 13 year old student in the seventh grade gifted class at West, passed away on February 22, 2005 after a six month battle with brain cancer.

Rory was cared for and loved by so very many people. He is survived by his Dad, Tom and brother, Sean. His journey touched the hearts of thousands of people around the world, all of who's lives are different in some way because they knew Rory, or know of him.

Rory's journey was chronicled by Tom on a website: <http://www2.caringbridge.org/il/rory> where Tom continues to share his experiences, emotions and insights born of the loss of his wife and two children. The site also provides an opportunity for members of the gifted community to communicate to Rory's family their support.

Plans are being made by a committee of West students, staff and parents to honor Rory through a yet undetermined memorial. Details will be shared as they evolve and will certainly be posted on the aforementioned website. Meanwhile the family has asked that any donations in Rory's memory be made to the Rory Zuba Medical Expense Fund at Alpine Bank.

Auburn

National Merit Scholars: Once again Auburn has outscored every other area high school in the number of students scoring in the top ½ % of Illinois students taking the PSAT. Kelly Rockwell and Calvin Zhang were named National Merit finalists, and Matt Strong a semifinalist in the competition. Arthur Surratt, received the distinction of National Achievement finalist.

All State Band and Orchestra: Leah Asher- Violin, Jay Jarrett-Trombone, Camille Woodruff-Horn.

WYSE: Auburn had four students who place in the Illinois state competition: Tyler Kerr (1st Biology, 4th Chemistry), Colleen Powers (2nd English), April Lundberg (4th English), and Kelly Rockwell (6th English).

JETS: Fifteen Auburn Students competed in the Test of Engineering Aptitude in Mathematics and Science where among all the Illinois teams Auburn Varsity placed 7th and JV 4th.

Auburn Scholastic Bowl: Placed Third in State at the IHSA Tournament in Peoria. Members include Tyler Kerr (Captain), Will Brooks, Colleen Powers, Ross Makulec, Ryan Salberg, Patrick Flanagan, Adam Morand and John Brown. Tyler and Colleen were named to the All Sectional and All State Teams and Tyler was also named to the Team Illinois All Star Team.

CAPA has been providing tech support for airing all the RPS205 Board of Education meetings this year on channel 20. Students man the cameras and media equipment. The district's media department had provided this service until funding was cut at the end of the 2004-05 school year

PGE KUDOS

Mike Golden for being there when the program needed his leadership.

Leon Saul (treasurer) and Pam Wilson (secretary) for years of service and dedication as PGE officers.

Tom Chuchna for stepping into the treasurer's job following Leon's retirement and John Torrence for stepping into the president's position for the 2005-06 school year.

Terry Mohaupt for his advocacy of our gifted children and his service as Chair of the Parent Affiliates Group of the Illinois Association for Gifted Children.

Ken Baliga for formatting our newsletter and keeping our website current.

Connie Bland for writing the grant for the Incentive Award from the College Board on behalf of PGE. We were disappointed to learn we did not win an award, but we appreciate the efforts of Academy staff and Mr. Keating assisting with data collection.

Mr Keating for organizing and hosting the Auburn College Night and the panelists who shared their experiences and insight: Kelly Rockwell, Chuck, Michele and Zach Beach and Fred Brechlin.

Academy Staff for showing their concern for our children by organizing and hosting the Drug and Alcohol Awareness Night for Academy families.

Mr. Smith for hosting our monthly PGE meetings at West.

Lin Milius for gathering, entering and formatting data for the gifted directory, as well as printing and distributing the finished product.

The committee overseeing Ruth's Memorial Scholarship.

Mr. Dixon, West Band Director extraordinaire, who's enthusiasm, fundraising, PR and teaching skills have resulted in the largest and most talented middle school band program in the city.

PGE205.org

Remember to check the website for updates on legislation, news about our gifted community, past newsletters and articles of interest to parent's of gifted and college bound students. We thank Ken Baliga for keeping the website current *year round* and hope you take time to visit and check out the information. We have a section we have attempted to develop called Frequently Asked Questions. It is our hope to continue that development, and to do that, we need to know what your questions are. Please send them to PGE@rps205.com

Upcoming Events
May 2: 7 pm PGE with Dr. Thompson at West
May 3: King Picture Day
May 12: 7 pm Auburn Awards Night
May 13: SIP Day, No School for West and King
May 16: 6 pm Auburn Booster Club
May 17: 6 PM King PTO Meeting
May 17: 6 PM West Ice Cream Social
May 17: 7:30 PM Auburn Spring Band Concert
May 19: 7 PM Auburn Red, Hot & Cool Jazz Concert
May 24: West Spring Sports Banquet
May 25: King Night of the Arts
May 30: Memorial Day, No School
May 31: West Rites of Passage and Awards Program
June 2: 2PM Auburn Graduation
June 3: Teacher Institute, No School
June 6: Last Day of School (partial day)
June 7: 6:30 PM Auburn Athletic Banquet at Sam's
August 16, 17: Auburn Registration
August 24: First Day of School
December 22, 2005-Jan 2, 2006: Winter Break
March 27-31, 2006: Spring Break

Middle School CAPA at Ellis

In 2006, grades 6-8 will become a true arts magnet middle school program at Ellis, with entry determined through audition. Grades K-5 will continue to function with a neighborhood designation. Ellis will work in conjunction with Auburn's CAPA program, with CAPA holding a certain number of seats (currently proposed at 75) for incoming freshman from Ellis. Central administration has assured PGE there will remain an adequate number of seats available for entering Auburn students not coming from Ellis.



**PARENTS FOR GIFTED
EDUCATION**

2302 Trillium Trail
Rockford, IL 61102

Email: PGE@rps205.com

PGE Families
Are Invited to a Forum with
Superintendent Dennis Thompson

Monday, May 2
7 PM in the West library

**What's the Plan for
Gifted Education in District 205?**

PGE ON THE WEB: PGE205.ORG

Have we Got Questions!

On May 2, 2005, PGE will have their final meeting of this school year. Dr. Thompson will join us to share his plans for the program and to take the opportunity to answer our questions. Here's a sample of questions PGE has received. Chances are, you'll have more of your own.

- ◇ Who will be in charge of the program next?
- ◇ Who will be in charge of testing next year?
- ◇ Will there be a change in the test matrix?
- ◇ Who will oversee high needs placement over the summer?
- ◇ Who will field questions regarding the program over the summer?
- ◇ Will the district's financial commitment to the program change next year?
- ◇ Will the district pay for the classes for gifted endorsement for all new staff?
- ◇ Are there any plans to expand the program or add pull out classes? If so, how will they be funded?
- ◇ Will our elementary students repeat the reading tests next year?
- ◇ How will our libraries be staffed next year?
- ◇ What will be the field trip policy next year?
- ◇ Will West students continue to receive high school credit for completing 2 years of a language?
- ◇ Will there be high school credit for completing algebra and geometry in the middle school?
- ◇ Can our middle school students take health online?
- ◇ Is there another way to get health to our eighth graders without having them miss 9 weeks of band?
- ◇ Can we continue to have dedicated gifted counselors at Auburn?
- ◇ Will Auburn get additional (more than three) zero hour classes?
- ◇ Will there be transportation for zero hour?
- ◇ Will the new principal at Auburn have experience working with gifted students?
- ◇ How can our juniors get transcripts at the end of this year?
- ◇ Is the district going to reimburse AP test fees for those scoring a 3, 4 or 5?
- ◇ Why aren't all Academy classes going to weighted?
- ◇ What is administration doing to prevent a teacher's strike?