



Board Meeting Recap

For Evanston Twp. High School District 202

ETHS Board of Education

Pat Savage-Williams, President
Monique Parsons, Vice President
Members: Jude Laude, Gretchen Livingston, Pat Maunsell, Liz Rolewicz, Stephanie Teterycz
Student Member: Carmiya Bady

Regular School Board Meeting
December 14, 2020

Remote learning continues into second semester

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, ETHS changed from in-person learning last March 16 and switched to remote (e-: electronic) learning from home, along with all Illinois schools by state mandate. With COVID surging in Illinois, this fall ETHS—and Chicago-area high schools—decided not to open in-person and to continue with e-learning at least through first semester.

At the December 14 school board meeting, Supt. Eric Witherspoon announced that e-learning will continue into second semester throughout January. He hopes sometime during second semester that ETHS can transition to a hybrid plan (part e-learning, part in-person), and if there's to be a change, ETHS will give parents, students, staff, and the community a 30-day notice.

"This is really about lives and safety," said Witherspoon. Evanston is in the state's Region 10, where the COVID positivity rate is hovering around 13%. To open up to hybrid learning, the Illinois Department of Public Health guidelines indicate that more mitigation is needed if the positivity rate exceeds 8%.

According to Dr. Peter Bavis, Asst. Supt./Curriculum & Instruction, everyone knows that in-person learning is the best educational model. However, many area districts that have attempted a hybrid model have switched back to remote learning given the extreme challenges that hybrid plans present for students and teachers.

Dr. Marcus Campbell, Asst. Supt./Principal, explained that in-person learning for ETHS won't be like returning to regular school. Only one-quarter of the students will attend school at a time. Masks must be worn and hand sanitizers will be omnipresent. Classroom desks will be fewer and six-feet apart. Sanitizing will be a paramount concern. Hallways will be one-way aided by new directional signage. Other precautions will include updated air filters and HVAC systems for better air circulation.

Board members gave shout-outs to ETHS faculty and staff for the hard work they've been doing to make remote learning as meaningful for students academically and socially-emotionally. They also praised

the school's social outreach to make sure parents and students understand there is help when and if it's needed. "Reach out; ETHS is here to help," said Board President Pat Savage-Williams.

Board concerns focused on how ETHS will let the community, as well as parents and students, know if and when plans change, and explaining what triggers the change. All agreed that communication is the key.

Witherspoon noted, "We're not working in isolation." He explained that the administration and staff meet continuously with regional high school districts, peers, education agencies, as well as with the Evanston Mayor's task force that includes 80+ organizations, including area hospitals and public health agencies.

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ETHS Advanced Placement success at all-time high

High school students enrolled in Advanced Placement courses take AP final exams in the spring. Their score(s), ranging from 1 to 5, can earn them credit in college, which can reduce their college course load and potentially save them thousands of dollars in tuition.

ETHS offers 26 AP courses across most academic areas and has gained national recognition for its diverse program, for its growing student participation, and its growing student success rate.

At the December 14 school board meeting, Dr. Peter Bavis gave an update on the 2020 AP results. Due to COVID, the College Board, which administers the AP program, gave the AP exams remotely. “Our teachers and students worked extraordinarily hard during this unprecedented time and as a result, ETHS is at an all-time high for student success on AP exams,” said Bavis. He added, “this is significant because nationally, success on AP exams show a decline from previous years.” ETHS’s success is also significant because, said Bavis, the College Board is not acknowledging the stressful influence of COVID on students learning remotely.

Last year, AP enrollment increased, as well as the number of exams taken, and of the amount of scores of 3 or more. The percentage of AP students who didn’t take the exam decreased from the previous year, but that is not surprising given the sudden shift to remote learning and testing. Of the 1,226 students enrolled in AP courses, 989 of them (81%) took one or more AP exams. And of those students, over two-thirds earned a score of 3+ on at least one exam.

This growth in enrollment is significant, said Bavis, because research shows that “even attempting an AP class increases a student’s academic trajectory and those who earned an AP exam score of 2 had better college performance and higher four-year graduation rates than students who didn’t take an AP course.”

Also significant were the gains shown by each racial subgroup. In 2020, 127 Black/African-American students took 127 AP exams, a 28% jump in AP students since 2012, while overall Black enrollment at ETHS increased by only 7%. And there has been a 97% increase in the number of Black students earning 3 or higher scores.

Last spring, 103 Latinx students took AP exams, a 29% increase since 2012, while overall Latinx enrollment grew by 44%. There was a 53% increase in Latinx students earning a 3, a marked boost in the percent of these students who could earn college credit with their results.

Over these same nine years, 645 White students took AP exams, a 24% increase since 2012, and 35% of them earned a 3 or better. The increased White enrollment in AP courses is consistent with the 25% growth in overall enrollment since 2012.

Overall, ETHS earned a 98% increase in scores of 3+ since 2007, a 67% boost in scores of 4+, and exceeded the national percentage of scores of 3+ in 23 of 26 subjects tested.

The most popular AP course at ETHS is English Language & Composition for juniors, which began in 2009-10 with 117 students, 113 who earned a 3+ on the exam. Since then, enrollment in that course has

grown 232% with a 163% increase in students scoring 3+. Other popular courses include AB Calculus, Psychology, US History, and Biology.

One major cause for the overall increase in AP enrollment and student success is teamASAP, a broad-ranging series of support programs started by AP students to help peers succeed in AP, even before they enter the class. According to Dale Leibforth, teamASAP advisor, offering the programs was harder this last year because of the transition to remote learning, so the organizers moved to online events and resources—and program attendance increased because students could attend remotely. Now about 600 students are involved in teamASAP.

Board members noted that despite significant gains among racial subgroups, academic disparity is still apparent. They also were concerned at the cause of some decline beginning three years ago. Both Bavis and Witherspoon said there is a decline in reading levels of entering freshmen that prevent them from being prepared for AP classes.

Other Board members asked about race and equity insights that teamASAP students and AP teachers can garner from students of color in AP classes to help improve their experience in AP classes.

Audit Report

The board received the FY 20 audit. Mary Rodino, CFO, reported ETHS received an unmodified (highest) audit opinion.