

NewsHub

The quarterly newsletter of your Erie's Public Schools

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What changes do YOU want to see at Erie High School?

Erie's Public Schools celebrates Black History Month

Erie's Public Schools

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Brian J. Polito, CPA
Superintendent



Edison students work cooperatively to build a tower using spaghetti and marshmallows.

District bolsters student supports *Focus on mental and emotional health grows*

The fifth-graders huddled in groups around fluffy mounds of marshmallows and piles of uncooked spaghetti, trying to figure out their next move.

Their assignment: Build the tallest freestanding structure possible, using only those ingredients.

As they speared marshmallows and pasta together, Mrs. Musone's students at Edison Elementary School weren't learning about questionable culinary combinations, engineering or architecture. They were learning something arguably more important: the value of teamwork and the benefits of listening to others' perspectives when working through a challenge.

The lesson is part of a new social and emotional learning curriculum being taught in all Erie's Public Schools elementary classrooms called Respectful Ways. The trauma-informed curriculum aims to help skills such as compassion, perseverance, respect and responsibility through project-based learning that includes discussion, crafts, games, group activities, performances, writing, and personal reflection.

"We know our students need these crucial skills, and Respectful Ways is a fun, thoughtful way for students to develop them," said Scherry Prater, the district's director of student services. "They're learning how to manage their emotions and foster strong, healthy relationships that create a safe and nurturing school climate."



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Investment in student supports pays dividends

New curriculum and additional staff, training help reach students districtwide



For Grief Awareness Day, East Middle School students created paper butterflies in memory of a family member and/or friend who died. Many students also shared words of encouragement to our students at East who are grieving. The activity was facilitated by a team that included the mental health therapist, behavior interventionists and guidance counselors.

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The addition of the new curriculum follows a restructuring of the Student Services department that included the hiring of more behavior interventionists and mental health therapists – there is now a mental health therapist at each school – with a professional development focus on cognitive behavior intervention.

Guidance counselors, mental health specialists and behavior interventionists have all collaborated in common trainings around suicide awareness and assessment, grief, cognitive behavior interventions, bullying and depression and anxiety, to expand the number of trained staff members who can help support students, Prater said.

“Common training allows for student services personnel to function as a multi-disciplinary team to support the whole student,” Prater said.

Support staff at schools also help by facilitating school wide education campaigns and activities.

Through its partnership with United Way of Erie County, the district also continues to strengthen partnerships with community organizations, including those focused on promoting students’ mental, behavioral and emotional health.

One such organization, Family Services of Northwestern Pennsylvania, offers a program called Strengthening Families Program for Parents and Youth 10-14 (SFP 10-14). Jennifer, an Erie’s Public Schools parent, recently participated with her husband and 13-year-old daughter.

Prior to completing SFP 10-14, their family was at a crisis point due to many overlapping stressors and each family member having their own individual worries and anxieties.

“Active steps were being taken to divide up our household,” Jennifer said. “Then the opportunity to participate in SFP 10-14 arose.”

Over the course of the seven-week program, Jennifer and her husband learned useful parenting and communication skills that they were able to implement right away.

“We learned to think about situations more from our tween’s perspective, and our tween learned to have empathy for our perspectives,” Jennifer said. “The change in our household atmosphere was dramatic, and thanks to that we were able to make the decision to move forward together as a family unit.”

SFP 10 -14 at Family Services of NW PA is a free, evidence-based program that allows parents and youth to practice skills through learning games and family projects. Between five and ten families participate in a seven-week cohort; space is limited. The next cohort begins Tuesday, April 9 at 5 p.m. at Family Services, 5100 Peach St. For more information, visit www.FSNWPA.org/SFP.

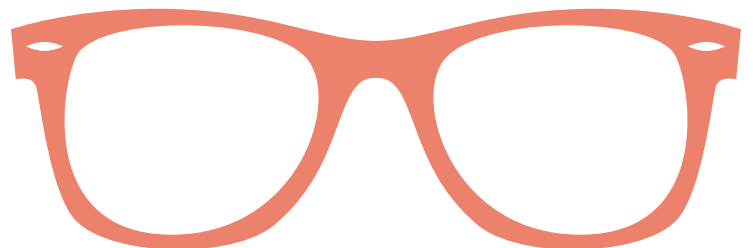
Partnership focused on improving student sight

United Way of Erie County, EPS team up with Glasses2Classes to provide eyeglasses

More than 7,000 Erie's Public Schools students recently were provided free eye screenings as part of a new partnership between the district, United Way of Erie County's community school model, and the Glasses2Classes program. Students who needed eyeglasses received them -- some on the very same day.

The partnership is a tangible example of how United Way's community schools model works to break down nonacademic barriers to student learning. Optical Academy's Glasses2Classes brings a mobile lab directly to a school for one-stop screening and fitting of eyewear.

"Some of our students and families face hurdles, financial and otherwise, in accessing eye care and, if they need them, eye glasses," Kerry Roach, the district's supervisor of health services. "By bringing Glasses2Classes to them in school, we help eliminate those hurdles. We ensure our students can see properly and have the resources and tools they need to learn."



A NEW DAWN

at Erie High School

Survey seeks input on needs of Erie High School

United Way of Erie County, EPS begin first phase of community school process



The multimillion-dollar metamorphosis of Erie High School isn't the only investment that Erie's Public Schools is making into the region's largest secondary school.

In the fall of 2023, the district and its longtime partner, United Way of Erie County, began planning a second transformation of sorts, similarly breathtaking in both scope and purpose: Erie High School, leaders from both organizations announced, would become the latest community school, backed by an initial investment by the Erie Community Foundation.

The community school model, already in place at all 10 district elementary schools and its three middle schools, works to eliminate non-academic barriers to student success — barriers like hunger, lack of healthcare, or lack of clothing, for example.

The process to create that kind of school at Erie High School will unfold in three phases, the first of which is focused on collecting school data and feedback from parents and the community. That's happening now. *(See box, right.)*

The second phase will begin this spring and will be focused on using data to determine the school's needs and how best to address them. In summer 2024, United Way will hire several community school directors who will lead those efforts moving forward.

During the third and final phase, United Way will work to secure community partners and resources to help students with what they need. That phase will begin next school year.



At left, an Erie High School student busy at work. Above, a student at Harding Elementary School and guardian participate in a Kindergarten-2nd grade family reading workshop. The workshop is one example of how the United Way of Erie County community school model works to break down barriers for families; in this instance, by bringing family members together during a special, fun event to work on building literacy skills. The model would work differently at the high school level, but would serve the same purpose.

Erie High School Principal Donald Orlando said that the community school model is a crucial piece of the school's future as the district works to assess Erie High's culture, academics, and operations.

"Erie High represents the entire Erie community," Orlando said. "We need to become a community school so we can provide the resources our students and families need. We need to expand beyond what we are currently doing and (becoming a community school) would provide us the resources to do so."

The survey of parents and community members happening now follows a similar survey of Erie High staff and students. Responses to that survey indicated the need for expanded opportunities for after-school engagement, increased staff support and resources, and renewed efforts to improve school culture and climate, according to United Way data.

The parent and community survey will remain open online through April.

HEY, ERIE!



United Way needs to hear from YOU to better understand how we can make Erie High a school you love.

The Community-Parent survey takes five minutes to complete and covers safety, culture, services and resources, graduation preparedness, communication and engagement.

Scan the QR code above to add your voice to the conversation.

EPS to move into new administration building

Cost-saving move aims to improve public access and customer service

Erie's Public Schools will soon have a new headquarters.

The district will begin to transition its central administration offices into a new home at 1910 Sassafra St. this summer, a move designed to improve public access and customer service.

"The configuration and floor plan of our new administration building allows us to easily welcome our families and students into the building, with more parking and convenient access to the services and resources that they need," Superintendent Brian Polito said.

The move also makes good fiscal sense, Polito said.

District architects have estimated the district's current administration building, located just blocks away at 21st and Sassafra streets, needs about \$13 million in renovations, including a new roof and a new heating and ventilation system.

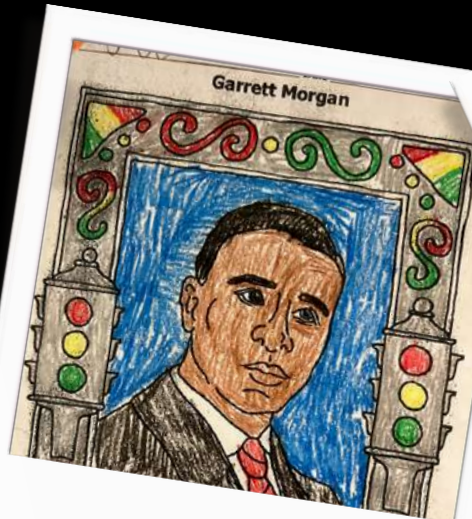
The Erie School Board approved the purchase of the new building in June for \$2.8 million. With planned modifications costing roughly \$5.4 million, the district will save about \$4 million over the cost of renovating the current building, Polito said.



The district's soon-to-be new headquarters at 1910 Sassafra Street most recently housed medical offices.



Erie's Public School celebrated Black History Month districtwide in February, with a different focus each week: language and literature, STEM, arts and music, and political science and social studies.



SPORTS SPOTLIGHT

Alexander Gabbard is a diver, but his background is in trampolining.

That might explain why, while most first-year divers are happy to execute a single somersault off of the board, Gabbard is able to regularly impress with two.

Gabbard began diving for the Erie High Royals this school year as a sophomore at WHERE, and immediately gained the attention of judges and fans alike with his incredible height off the diving board.

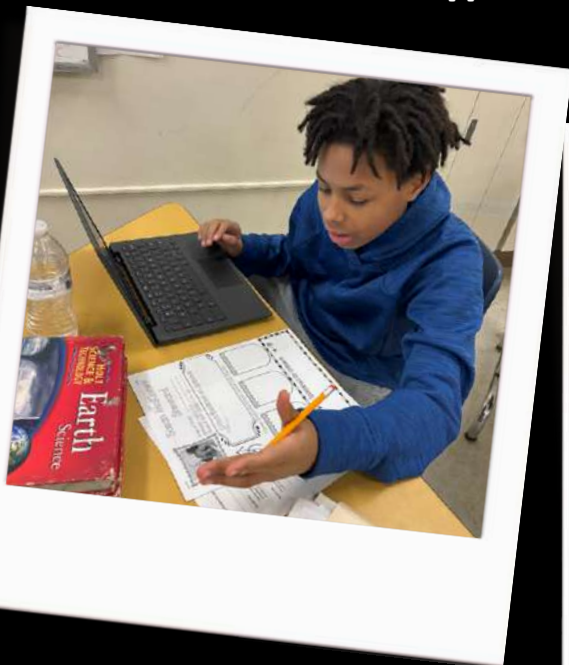
Gabbard placed second at the recent Iroquois Invitational behind Fairview High School senior Aari Fox -- Gabbard's only second place in a year full of firsts.

In a show of great sportsmanship, the Harbor Creek High School cheerleaders invited our Erie High School cheerleaders to perform in collaboration during halftime at the Feb. 9 varsity boys' basketball game between the two teams. Thanks, Huskies!



Above, Erie High Royals diver Alexander Gabbard is a blur as he somersaults off of the diving board. At left, Erie High Royals cheerleaders perform at halftime of the Feb. 9 boys' basketball game against Harbor Creek at the invitation of the Harbor Creek cheerleaders.

Discover what our students learned and how they applied that knowledge in the classroom by visiting eriesd.org/blackhistory.





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