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To: RCSD Board of Education
From: Dr. Shaun Nelms, Superintendent
Dr. Stephen Uebbing, Project Director
Re: Update on East EPO Progress
Date: November 7, 2019

What follows is a brief update of progress regarding the University of Rochester's work as the Educational Partnership Organization (EPO) for East High School (East) since the inception of the project. On behalf of the University, we wish to thank the Board of Education and senior leadership for their ongoing support for East scholars.

This report focuses on student achievement indicators, student life indicators, and prospects for the future. It is intended as a Year 5 update and will focus on data from the year prior to the EPO to the 2018-19 school year.

Lower School: The Lower School at East consists of a small sixth grade and grades seven and eight. We originally included grade six in the East configuration to have a greater chance at development in literacy and mathematics. We spent considerable time developing a pipeline from a local elementary school directly to East. In addition, this pipeline would ensure that incoming sixth graders reflected the demographics of the district as a whole. However, that partnership is not yet fully successful for a variety of reasons. We have a very healthy enrollment at grade seven, but still endeavor to run a full grade six based on the best practices included in the EPO plan. To date, we have approximately 36% of Lower School and 32% of Upper School scholars who live within the East catchment area, up from 5% when the EPO began.

Lower School Academic Measures

In this section, we present three measures of academic success as follows: scores on the New York State (NYS) testing program in English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics, and progress in reading on the Reading Inventory (RI), a nationally norm referenced test.

The NYS tests for students in grades 3-8 are standards-based examinations given over multiple days. The Rochester City School District (RCSD) has historically contracted with an independent company for scoring. The scorers hired by the company may, or may not, include teachers from both East and the RCSD, as well as teachers from other districts across NYS.

The basis for the test is the Common Core Curriculum and the NYS Learning Standards. Students receive scores ranging from Performance Levels 1-4 with score meaning as follows:

Level 1: Well below proficient in standards for their grade.

Level 2: Partially proficient in standards for their grade.

Level 3: Proficient in standards for their grade.

Level 4: Excel in standards for their grade.

<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/assessment/ei/scorereports/2017/elascorereport-17engac.pdf>

Proficiency is a relatively high standard, aligned with the higher levels of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Students who score at Level 1 do not meet the standards for their grade and are not making adequate progress toward graduation. Students scoring at Level 2, though not fully proficient, are considered to be making progress toward graduation. Students at Levels 3 and 4 meet or exceed the standards for their grade and are considered to be making progress toward being college and career ready.

Diane Ravitch, education historian and former Undersecretary of Education, describes “proficient” as “a very high level of academic achievement... (equivalent to) a solid A- and not less than a B+.”

What follows is a comparison for scores of Lower School students from 2012-13 to 2018-19 on the NYS 3-9 testing program.

NY State Testing Program, English Language Arts: East Lower School, 2014-15– 2018-19

Academic Year	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
18-19	58%	32%	8%	2%
14-15	87%	11%	2%	0%

The percentage of scholars scoring at Level 2 and above on English Language Arts (ELA) rose from 13% in 2014-15, to 42% in 2018-19. We expect the highly focused program of support and academic intervention available to all students to yield continued improvement throughout the high school years.

NY State Testing Program, Mathematics: East Lower School, 2014-15– 2018-19

Academic Year	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
18-19	65%	19%	11%	6%
14-15	82%	15%	4%	0%

Ravitch, Diane, (2013). *Reign of Error: The Hoax of the Privatization Movement and the Danger to America's Public Schools*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf 5

Mathematics results are similar, but very different in a number of ways. As with ELA, the number of scholars scoring at the lowest level has decreased sharply. Unlike ELA, however, the number of scholars scoring at higher levels, Levels 3 and 4, has increased sharply. Indeed, 17% of Lower School students are fully proficient, while another 19% are partially proficient in 2018-19. **Additionally, the Lower School met the required NYSED Demonstrable Improvement indicators in ELA and Mathematics.**

Clearly, these results are still comparatively low. Suburban schools typically see from 30-70% of their students reaching proficiency. However, the trajectory at East is promising.

Reading: *The Reading Inventory* is a research-based, computer-adaptive student assessment that measures reading skills and longitudinal progress from Kindergarten through college readiness. *The Reading Inventory* measures reading growth on the Lexile Framework for Reading, a scientifically proven tool that measures both a reader’s ability and difficulty of the text at the same time. East administers this assessment three to five times per year for screening and progress monitoring. Scores are expressed as a Lexile, a tool used to match readers with leveled reading books. Lexile scores are organized into bands to indicate a reader’s ability, ranging from below basic, basic, proficient, or advanced (roughly corresponding to the levels described on the NYS ELA assessments above).

The literacy program at East involves all scholars in grades 6-9 receiving a 72-minute literacy class in addition to their English class. Services in these classes range from targeted intervention and remediation through the use of blended learning solutions, such as Houghton Mifflin Harcourt’s (HMH) System 44 and Read 180, to enrichment via a Readers’ and Writers’ Workshop model based on each individual scholar’s Lexile score and needs. ***Double periods in ELA and Math at grades 6-9 are part of the additional resources critical to scholar success at East.***

Our partners at HMH (a national company/service provider) have repeatedly indicated that initial data on our incoming students is among the lowest and most concerning they have encountered. Despite this, growth data for scholars at East is most promising. We have one group of 43 scholars who have experienced four years in the literacy program at East (throughout their grade 6-9 experience, as designed): they began their time at East as sixth graders in 2015 and progressed in the program through grade 9 during the 2018-19 school year. We obtained baseline Reading Inventory data for this group at the start of their program indicating only 7% (three scholars) scored in the proficient or advanced range and 84% (36 scholars) scored in the lowest band, below basic. However, after four years in our literacy program, 58% (25 scholars) scored in the proficient or advanced range, while another 23% (10 scholars) moved to basic, and only 19% (8 scholars) remained in the below basic band. Of these remaining in the below basic band, although they did not move an entire performance level, all showed improvement within their Lexile, with the average improvement of this group at 574 Lexile points, well above “typical” growth of 100 Lexile points per year.

While the above represents a small group of students who have experienced the full extent of the literacy program as designed, data on the progress of all students reading below grade level in grades 6-9 also demonstrates our success on a larger scale. At the end of the 2018-19 school year, all students as well as almost all of our traditionally underserved subgroups demonstrated **more than** one year’s growth in literacy, and in some cases, groups nearly doubled normative growth, as shown in the table below.

Reading Inventory Lexile Growth of Below Grade Level Readers, East Grades 6-9, 2015-16 – 2018-19

Demographic Groups	Growth Rate (Years)				
	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19 (every other day)	2018-19 (every day)
All Students	1.5	1.3	1.3	1.7	1.7

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African American	1.7	1.5	1.0	1.6	1.8
Hispanic	1.0	0.9	1.2	1.2	1.3
Students with Disabilities	n/a	1.1	0.9	0.9	1.7
Limited English Proficient	n/a	0.7	0.9	1.1	1.2

Improvement in reading is particularly difficult for secondary students, for many reasons. This growth portends academic improvement though high school and beyond for these scholars.

Ninth Grade Academy: Extensive research, including recent work from the University of Chicago, notes the importance of a successful ninth grade experience for students if they are to graduate from high school. Traditionally, ninth grade has been a major barrier for our students. It is the first time they must pass classes to move on. They also take their first Regents examinations (algebra and science). We put a great deal of our effort into a successful ninth grade experience. New ninth graders have their own hallway, their own administrators, and appropriate social-emotional support. They also have mentors from Hillside. Thus far, those supports have been effective.

The following table indicates credit completion and Regents passing results.

East Freshman Academy Academic Results: 2014-15 - 2018-19

Measure	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
5+ Credits	48.8%	80.2%	77.4%	73%	79%
Passing Algebra Regents	26.5%	45.2%	45.3%	55.1%	60.1%

Notable is the number of students going on to tenth grade with all requirements met. Previous to the EPO, only 26.5% of freshman passed the algebra Regents, a requirement for graduation, and less than half had accumulated 5 credits. We saw immediate improvements in both credit completion and Regents passing in Year 1 of the EPO (2015-16). For 2018-19 we crossed the 60% benchmark for freshman passing the algebra Regents, and almost hit 80% of all students accumulating five or more high school credits. It is notable, that the most recent senior class, which had a 69.6% graduation rate, only realized a 45.2% passing rate on the algebra Regents in 2015-16. We are excited about the trajectory represented within this ninth grade.

Upper School: The Upper School at East consists of all grades 9-12. Although we present the Ninth Grade Academy separately above, it is part of the Upper School. There are many data points one must understand in order to assess progress at a high school. Chief among these is the high school graduation, persistence as measured by the dropout rate, NYS Regents results and credit attainment. In a separate section, we present measures of student life, including data on behavior and discipline and student activities.

In the table below, we present the graduation rate for cohorts from 2011 through the most recent graduating class. We follow this with a discussion about trajectory data.

Cohort	Grad Year	4-Year Grad Rate (Aug)
2011 (Prior to EPO)	2015	33.3
2012	2016	40.2
2013	2017	45.3
2014	2018	60.6
2015	2019	69.6

A graduation rate of 69.6% for the Class of 2019 is remarkable, demonstrating how hard these scholars and our faculty and staff have worked. The 4-year graduation rate for the Class of 2019 is much higher than the 6-year graduation rate for the Class of 2015, which was only 41.9%. The graduation trajectory rate looks promising. 73.8% and 60.8% of juniors have passed their algebra and ELA Regents respectively, as opposed to 69.3% and 54% of the Class of 2018, which achieved a 60.6% graduation rate.

Another predictor of graduation rate is success on the NYS Regents Examination Program. In order to graduate, students must pass Regents examinations in English, mathematics, science, and social studies. There are alternative pathways that allow a student to opt out of part of the social studies requirement and it is also possible to pick up the science requirement in Career and Technical Education (CTE) classes. That is why we focus on math and ELA when tracking graduates. In 2018-19, we realized a 69.6% graduation rate with 69.3% and 54% of our seniors started having passed the math and ELA Regents respectively entering senior year. The Class of 2020 suggests a higher success rate as 73.8% and 60.47% started senior year having passed those two Regents examinations.

East Upper School Regents Passing Trends (%) by Cohort Entering Senior Year

Cohort/Exam	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Grad Rate	40.2	45.3	60.6	69.6	TBD
Math	48.73	47.05	56.25	69.32	73.78
ELA	30.91	32.06	35.58	53.98	60.37

An important indicator of graduation rate is the dropout rate. The table that follows is indicative of a positive trend.

East Upper School Dropout Rates: 2012-13 – 2018-19

Cohort	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012
Year 1	0.6%	0.0%	1.9%	1.2%	0.9%	3.7%	n/a
Year 2		1.9%	2.5%	12.9%	4.8%	6.3%	16.6%
Year 3			11.6%	14.8%	17.8%	19.4%	23.3%
Year 4				23.0%	23.2%	38.5%	41.0%

These data report the percentage of a cohort that had dropped out after a given number of years. So, for the cohort that began school in 2012, 16.6% had dropped out by the end of year two. In contrast, for the cohort that began in

2016, only 2.5% had dropped out after year two. This is not an exact predictor of graduation rate, because some students are not academically eligible to graduate after four years of school. In the case of the 2015 cohort, 69.6% of the group graduated after four years, while 7.3% of the group was still enrolled but had not finished their academic requirements. Those scholars may return to East to finish their requirements, obtain an equivalency diploma, or enter employment.

Of the current (Class of 2020) senior class, 11.6% have dropped out, down from 14.8% from last year and 23.3% from the 2012 cohort. This suggests continued progress in raising the graduation rate.

Again, trends appear positive. The 2015 cohort is the most recent graduating class, Class of 2019. Previous entering senior classes were well behind the 2015 cohort in Regents exam completion.

Digging deeper into cohort data provides more promise. As mentioned earlier, 60.1% of current sophomores have passed the mathematics Regents. Those students who were not successful will have multiple opportunities to pass the test over the next few years.

There is promising news in other areas as well. Last year, 58.3% (91) of our eighth grade scholars earned one or more credits during their eighth grade year. 22.4% already passed the math Regents and 43.6% passed the Regents in a language other than English.

Since the EPO, Upper School scholars earned 716 college credits in Spanish and 15 scholars earned the NYSED Seal of Bi-literacy, representing the only students in the RCSD to do so.

Student Life: We address three measures of “student life.” The first is behavioral data, as measured by suspensions and disciplinary incidents. The second is attendance. Finally, we present data on Family and Community Engagement.

East Behavioral and Disciplinary Data

School Year	Incidents	Short Term	Long Term	In School	Out of School	In Alt. Program	Total Suspensions
2014-15	1,629	2,374	94	1,423	968	77	2,468
2018-19	332	465	21	398	68	20	486

These data show a dramatic decrease in suspension incidents, total suspensions, and out of school suspensions. A suspension incident may involve more than one student; thus, the total number of suspensions is always higher than the total number of incidents. We note that prior to the EPO there were 2,468 recorded suspensions. It was reported to us that there were also many more unrecorded suspensions.

Last year, there were 486 suspensions school wide, 398 of which were in-school, as the restorative practice approach often moves a student out of the mainstream until the restorative meeting can occur, which is often on the same day and recorded as an in-school suspension.

The East team has worked hard to create a major shift from a punitive culture to a collaborative restorative culture. At East, we view suspension as a serious matter. East attempts to build community and that means keeping the community together. Restorative practice is the foundational approach to behavior management in the school. Training in restorative practice is provided to all East faculty and staff, and our social workers oversee and monitor implementation.

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Other reforms also support a shift in school culture. East has a low counselor-student ratio to provide social emotional support to all students in a timely manner. All East students spend 30 minutes daily in a “Family Group,” where they develop positive, supportive relationships with staff and other students and feel a true sense of belonging at East. There are also more school administrators in place at East to support a positive, learning-based culture.

East Average Daily Attendance (ADA) Data

	2014-15 ADA*	2018-19 ADA
Upper School	77.0%	82.0%
Lower School		89.7%

*full school

Although attendance has improved, it has been one of our greatest challenges. We monitor attendance closely and have a comprehensive plan in place to improve scholar attendance. Although many more of our students are engaged, there are still a fair number who are not. There have been significant reductions in the dropout rate, but we still struggle to keep everyone on track and in school. Note that Average Daily Attendance (ADA) at both the Upper School and the Lower School are higher than full school attendance prior to the EPO.

Behavioral and attendance data only begins to tell the story of East. We have utilized the Franklin-Covey “Leader in Me” program, with emphasis at the Lower School, with very positive results. Our students report that they feel safe in school. Participation in extracurricular activities increases every year. The total number of athletic teams and student participation on those teams have also increased. We have added teams at multiple levels, and our teams are being more successful.

The Family and Community Engagement (FACE) committee (formerly PTO) continues to see a significant increase of parent/guardian participation. Parent/guardian membership on the committee has increased from one or two in the first year to 11 in 2018-19. FACE sponsored two significant initiatives this past year. First, several parents and staff members attended the National Community Schools Conference, where they learned specific details about the nature of Community Schools and how to best develop and implement them within their own schools. They returned to present to the monthly FACE meeting about what they learned. FACE co-chairs led a professional learning series on parent and family engagement to a group of approximately 18 East teachers. The teachers were required to develop a capstone project to promote parent engagement that would be implemented in the 2018-19 school year. These teachers will present their culminating projects to the rest of the East staff at an upcoming superintendent’s conference day. Additionally, as part of the Title 1 funding initiative, there are several events that have been collaboratively planned with parents to educate parents/families and scholars on graduation requirements, academics, and restorative practices. FACE constructs a robust family event calendar in consultation with parents/guardians that is approved by the Governance Council. Most recently, 343 people attended our fall open house, an increase of over 50% from last year.

Role of Resources: The University of Rochester never suggested that we could make progress without additional resources. It was necessary to build the infrastructure necessary for success. We have our own superintendent and central office staff, including a business administrator, special assistant, athletic director, nurses, special programs director, data specialist, and special education administrator. Our close supervision of special education has resulted in better outcomes for our students and less conflict with families. We have had no third party hearings. When compared with other RCSD schools, some of our per pupil costs include both the RCSD Central Office costs and our own Central Office costs, thus skewing the analysis.

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As noted earlier, when we came to East we found the formal curriculum essentially nonexistent, thus necessitating a complete overhaul of the curriculum, a five-year project involving every teacher at every level; an expensive but critical undertaking. Additionally, we provided a consistent, proven approach to teaching and planning. Our teachers now spend up to 72 minutes in daily collaborative planning and receive 10 days of additional professional development during the summer, plus additional time during the school year. We estimate that our teachers have completed nearly 50,000 compensated hours of professional development and curriculum writing. All this drives our per pupil costs.

We hear reports from other schools and districts of restorative practice NOT being effective. Anytime we hear such a report, we ask about implementation and administration. The answer is always the same; a few counselors and administrators are trained, and attempt to oversee the entire program. (See the URCUES website for a detailed discussion on Restorative Practice.) As noted earlier, there were 2,468 recorded suspensions in the 2014-15 school year prior to the EPO. We believe there were hundreds of unrecorded suspensions as well, and thus estimate the total number of suspensions closer to 3,000 that year. Last year (2018-19), we had 486 suspensions of which 398 were “in school,” often for less than a full day. How is this related to budget? We added seven social workers and maintain a very low counselor student ratio. When we instituted restorative practice, we provided compensated training for every teacher, every staff member, and every administrator. Every staff member oversees a daily “Family Group,” where we can help build the right school culture for our scholars. We also added administrators to assist in creating the right culture for our kids. Our students report overwhelmingly that they feel safe in school.

Almost every one of our students is in a support period every day where they receive both targeted intervention and general academic support. Given the reality that our students enter East, on average, four years below grade level, these and other intensive supports are necessary to achieve the growth we have seen. Our students have proved to us that they are smart and capable. These support systems just bring that out.

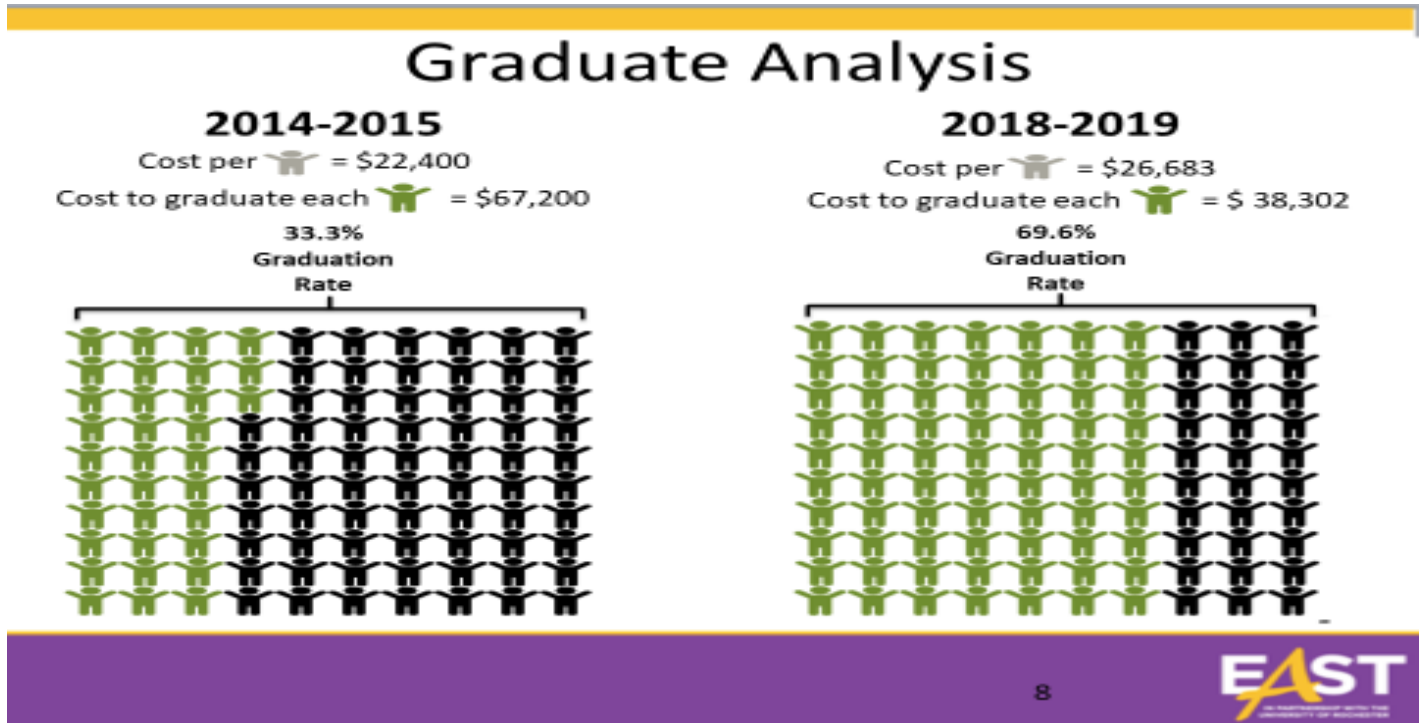
We have lower student-teacher ratios, and our teachers work a longer day and accept more responsibility, for which they receive more compensation. All students in grades 6-9 receive double instruction in ELA and math, an effective cost effective practice, but still costly.

When the University accepted the role of EPO at East, we did so under the stipulation that we would be able to create the conditions necessary to turn around a very low performing urban secondary school. We believe that urban education, by its nature is much more costly. The number of students living in very real poverty, having experienced trauma in their lives, and the disproportionate number of students for whom English is a new language create challenges unique to urban education. The NYS funding formula only begins to address these needs.

But the challenges are not simply about money. Too many school districts have agreed to collective bargaining agreements that restrain innovation. Consistent high expectations and well developed and delivered instructional programs require a collective effort and agreement about best practices that can be difficult to achieve under some collective bargaining agreements. Our collective bargaining agreement with East teachers reflects a commitment to best practices and whole school accountability.

The annual per pupil cost analysis used by SED and others is fundamentally flawed. It measures the number of students served in a given year against the budget for that year. Students, who fail to move on, are still part of the student population, thus they will be counted again the following year at the same grade level. Some are in school for five, six, or even more years often without ever graduating. A way to equalize those repeating costs is to focus on cost per “on-time graduate.” In the following example, we measure costs per graduate for the

Class of 2015, prior to the EPO against the cost per graduate for the Class of 2019,. This analysis only includes the cost for on-time graduates.



In no way do we wish to suggest that those students who are in school and do not graduate do not receive benefits from their attendance. Students who attend school but fail to graduate benefit from a rich, caring environment. High school graduation is a benchmark target, but not the only important outcome. But it is an important target, and the success of East scholars suggests that the additional resources supporting their school experience results in more students graduating as a lower per pupil cost.

After Year 5, we will begin to increase enrollment at East, thus lowering per pupil costs. Part of our original proposal to the RCSD Board of Education was to create a model that could inform work in other high need settings. We are in the midst of several research projects to capture these successes for both the research community and the practicing K-12 community.

What is the trajectory for future success? The EPO is now in the final year of its five-year agreement with the RCSD and the NYSED. Given success at the Lower School, increased passing rates at the Upper School, and lower dropout rates, we can expect the graduation rate to continue to improve.

At some point, we can systematically reduce the level of resources allocated to East, but must always realize that we are a “turn-around” school serving students from high poverty areas. Urban education is expensive. Urban education in a non-select school is even more expensive. Urban education in a turn-around school, such as East, is more expensive still. Creating systems of academic intervention to address systemic educational neglect, while at the same time accelerating learning opportunities to ensure students leave high school college and/or career ready, demands resources beyond what is needed in many wealthier school districts.

In the final analysis, this is not simply an issue for the RCSD, it is an issue for State and Federal policymakers. If there is to be an honest attempt to provide all students with a successful educational experience, we need to

be open to providing the resources and collective bargaining agreements that allow best practices to be put in place and sustained.

Respectfully:

Dr. Shaun Nelms, Superintendent

Dr. Stephen Uebbing, Director