

Here are the Minutes of the East High United meeting held on October 11, 2007:

The meeting started on a sad note as we honored the memory of two members of the East community who passed away this month – Rachael Hugo, East Class of 2001, lost her life while serving her country in Iraq and long-time and well-loved history teacher Aaron Cohn succumbed after a two-year battle with cancer.

The principle focus of the meeting was an introduction to Infinite Campus. This is the district-wide system that, among other things, provides parents with computer access to current information about their students' progress at school via what is known as the Parent Portal. As described on the school district web site, "Class schedules, assignments and grades can be viewed. E-mail hyperlinks facilitate communication with classroom teachers. In addition, schools post important information on the home page, such as events, notices, etc. Attendance information is also available. The Parent Portal allows report cards to be viewed online and printed."

The most useful aspect of the system from a parent's perspective is that it enables up-to-date access to a student's grades in his or her classes. This is also the source of what is currently the principle drawback of the system -- while teachers are encouraged to use the system to record grades, they are not required to do so. For those that don't, this significant benefit of the system for parents is lost. The expectation is that an increasing percentage of teachers will use the system as time goes on, perhaps prompted by requests from parents that they get with the program. The system is already in place at Middleton, for example, and 30 % to 50% of the teachers use it there, and there is the expectation that the percentage will increase. A similar participation rate might be expected for the Madison schools.

The goal is for parents with students at the district's high schools to have access to the system by the time first quarter grades come out. East is the last of the four high schools scheduled for the roll-out. Access for parents of students in middle and elementary schools will follow once the high school access is up and running.

In light of confidentiality and security concerns, parents will have to go through a registration process in order to gain access to the system. The sign-up process was described in a letter that was recently mailed to homes with students' progress reports. The school has scheduled six sections between November 5 and November 8 for parents to come to East, obtain an activation code upon the presentation of proper identification (driver's license, state-issued ID, or a valid passport), and explore the Parent Portal on computers at East, with support available for those who need it. The sections will take place:

Monday, November 5 – 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 6 – 7:00 a.m. to 9:30 a.m.

Tuesday, November 6 – 5:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 7 – 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 7 – 5:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

Thursday, November 8 – 7:00 a.m. to 9:30 a.m.

After November 19, parents who are unable to come to East during any of these times can visit East's main office between 7:30 and 4:00 on school days and sign up. In addition, it is possible to download and print the required Access Agreement from the District's website. The form can be filled out and sent to the school, but the rub here is that the form must be notarized. After properly completed forms are received by the school, activation codes will be mailed to the parents.

After the initial series of sign-up sessions, the school will take a look at whether it makes sense to try to schedule some sessions in community centers or other locations in the community where sessions may be easier for some parents to attend.

In other news, homecoming went well in nearly all categories except the outcome of the football game. There seemed to be a lot of spirit in the school. The dance was a success with about 800 students attending.

While our meeting took place before some well-publicized violent incidents at LaFollette and near West, there was a bit of discussion about how such dangers are handled at East. Over the summer, representatives of the police department contacted the school to say that they had detected an increase in gang activity in the East attendance area. As a result, the police had more of a presence at East when school began. Mr. Harris indicated that he thought this was all to the good - the police officers were reaching out and making relatively friendly contacts with students from the start.

Mr. Harris also said that, in his opinion, the best defense against many violent altercations among students is building a level of trust among students and teachers such that students are willing to tip off a teacher or administrator when trouble seems to be brewing. He said he has seen some improvement on that score at East. This has helped defuse some potential situations. As it is, there have been only two physical altercations during the first six weeks of school, which Mr. Harris viewed as positive.

Jill Jokela handed out a sheet that summarized current demographic information for the District's four high schools that she assembled. For the first time, East has a smaller attendance than LaFollette (by 4 students). This is mostly attributable to the fact that East has a small sophomore class – about 50 students less than LaFollette's sophomore class, and about 60 students less than the average of the other three classes at East. West and Memorial are both larger. East is the most ethnically diverse of the four high schools, with the highest percentage of non-white students (44%). Among the four high schools, East also has the highest number and highest percentage of both low income students and English Language Learner students. Both percentages have increased since last year. East has a lower number and a lower percentage of special ed students this year than it had last year. A copy of the tables of figures that Jill prepared will be posted on the East High United website. (Jill's facility with numbers has not gone unnoticed – she was recently appointed by the School Board to serve as the sole parent representative on the school district's Math Task Force.)

Next meeting: **Thursday, November 8**, at 7 pm in the East LMC. The topic is yet to be determined, but sure to be worthwhile.