

All In at East



A Progress Report from the
University of Rochester–East High School
Educational Partnership Organization

February 2019

For more information and PDFs in English and Spanish: rochester.edu/warner/cues





The University of Rochester could not stand by and let East High School close without offering our **best efforts** to **turn it around.**

If Not Us, Then Who?

How this Unique University-School Partnership Came to Be

In April 2014, the president of the Board of Education of the Rochester City School District approached the University of Rochester about becoming the Educational Partnership Organization (EPO) overseeing East High School, an iconic yet persistently failing Rochester high school. The State of New York had labeled East as an “out of time” school, having tried every intervention at its disposal without success. Unless the district placed the school under the supervision of a receiver, such as an EPO, East High School would close.

In 2015, only 33 percent of the class graduated on time. The dropout rate was 41 percent, and there were 2,468 suspensions. The projected graduation rate for 2016 was 19 percent.

The University did not take the request to partner with East lightly. As an EPO, we would have to develop the capacity to take on such an enormous commitment, and we recognized the tremendous risk involved. But there was a clear and present crisis at East, and we were asked to step up. If not us, then who?

The University could not stand by and let the school close without offering our best efforts to turn it around. Recognizing the need for expanded resources, to renegotiate union contracts, and to make deep and fundamental changes in the school, we accepted the invitation from the Board and began a year of planning. In September 2015, the EPO welcomed the first class of students.

1,036
Students

Total Enrollment 2017-18

By Race

- **52.61%** Black or African American
- **33.49%** Hispanic
- **8.88%** White
- **4.15%** Asian, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander
- **0.48%** Two or more
- **0.39%** American Indian and Alaska Native

91%

Economically
Disadvantaged
Students

19%

English
Language
Learners

13%

Students
with
Disabilities



Consistently Stepping Up

Thoughts from Our Leaders

This report is an effort to communicate our work to the communities we serve and our partners. While our scholars have amazed us with their many success stories, and the trajectory for the future looks positive, we are not ready to declare East a complete success story. Nor is the University interested in taking credit for the accomplishments of our faculty, staff, scholars, and families. They are succeeding because they did the work. The University provided structure, systems, and advocacy to support the success of everyone in the East community.

The EPO has enjoyed deep community support from agencies, philanthropists, and city government. The Board of Education of the Rochester City School District has been instrumental. The Board has supported the additional costs for turnaround schools and given us the freedom to implement a best-practice model. The New York State Education Department and the Board of Regents have also been valuable partners, providing technical assistance, policy flexibility, and very real encouragement. Close partnering with our employee associations has been vital, and we appreciate the willingness of our teachers

to rethink their practices. We are especially inspired by our families and scholars. They have consistently stepped up to meet the challenges of college and career readiness.

We are currently in our fourth year of the partnership between the University and East. We now have verified academic and other data from the three completed school years. These data provide just part of the story of what has occurred at East. They point to significant gains in graduation rates, a changed culture that puts relationships and personal accountability at the heart of the community, and an improved academic program and environment that supports student learning and achievement. Here we share these results as well as the programs and practices that we believe have been critical to the positive trends we see at East.

Our current efforts focus on continuing to execute the plan in place with fidelity and flexibility. We also outline here what we see as areas of focus in this work as we continue to grow as a community. We are ever mindful of the work ahead for East, the Rochester City School District, and urban schools nationwide.

Dr. Shaun Nelms

*Superintendent
East High School*

Dr. Stephen Uebbing

*Director
University of Rochester-East High School
Educational Partnership Organization (EPO)*

Changing the Culture

First and foremost, we sought to help our scholars feel safe and valued. A foundational element of the entire plan was to create a school culture based on trusting relationships and individual dignity. The use of the word “scholars” is an example of that. It is an aspirational term, suggesting a learned person. That is what we desire for our students, that they see themselves as scholars, with all that word implies regarding intellectual curiosity, effort, accountability, and responsibility.

Cultural change is difficult to measure. Perhaps the simplest way to indicate the change in culture at East is by looking at systems that deal with inappropriate behavior. Before the EPO, when students misbehaved, they were likely to be suspended. This punitive approach had dire academic consequences. In 2014, East suspended students at least 2,468 times, 39 percent of which were out of school. By comparison, during the 2017-18 school year, there were only 369 suspensions, of which 12 percent were out of school. That is not because we now tolerate inappropriate behavior. Rather, we treat inappropriate

behavior as a violation of the culture of the community, supporting opportunities to repair relationships and rebuild that culture. We are thoughtful in our approach to discipline. Suspensions are reserved as a last option only after we’ve tried other restorative approaches and for the most serious offenses. We have found that we can resolve many conflicts and repair relationships more successfully with this approach, and far fewer students are missing instructional time.

We have also seen improvements in attendance. Average daily attendance increased from 77 percent in 2014-15 to 90 percent at the Lower School (grades 6-8) and 82 percent in the Upper School (grades 9-12) in 2017-18, with further increases in Fall 2018 to 91 percent and 85 percent, respectively. While a significant gain, it is not nearly enough. We still have, on average, over 10 percent of our students missing school on any given day and over 30 percent of our students missing at least 10 percent of their school days. We are hopeful that the stronger school-going culture built at the Lower School will translate into better Upper School attendance in the years ahead.



Mission

At East, we are taking charge of our future by

- **being tenacious**
- **thinking purposefully**
- **advocating for self and others**

Relationships and Practices that Support Students and Community

The improvements at East can be traced to implementation of **five systemic changes**.

1	2	3	4	5
Restorative Practices	The Family Group	Adequate Support Staff	The Right People	A Focus on Community
<p>We take a school-wide restorative practices approach to school discipline, behavior, and relationships. At East, it is the responsibility of all parties to build and repair relationships within the community.</p> <p>Every adult at East has received training in restorative practices, and our team of social workers oversees implementation.</p>	<p>Every scholar in the building belongs to a small group that meets daily under the guidance of one or two adults.</p> <p>We designed this structure to ensure a close relationship with a caring adult for every student and a place where we can foster a culture of care, trust, and accountability that prioritizes relationships.</p>	<p>Many of our scholars exhibit extraordinary courage in the face of chronic trauma in their young lives. The scholars are smart and resilient but also benefit tremendously from the support of additional school counselors and school social workers to help navigate the challenges and social-emotional trauma associated with living in a high-poverty environment.</p>	<p>From the start, the EPO has insisted that every adult working at East be “All In” and involved for the right reason: to put students at the heart of the school and to do the hard work of transforming a high-need urban high school.</p> <p>To that end, all existing faculty and staff were invited to reapply for their positions at East. They then were asked to commit to the plan to be “All In,” which they would help to define and build as a community.</p>	<p>East partners with 13 community agencies. We have a school-based health center, and dental services are provided onsite through the partnership with the University of Rochester. Our scholars have mentors from the community.</p> <p>The Family and Community Engagement (FACE) committee has worked to provide better access for families and thereby increase family engagement.</p>



Impact

The impact of the cultural changes goes beyond decreased suspensions and increasing attendance. A simple walk down the hallway has a different vibe these days—one can see that scholars are more connected to teachers, staff, and each other. There exists a new vitality and respect in the way scholars carry themselves and move through the building. There is an increased sense of safety. A recent survey of scholars placed trust in teachers and staff at more than 98 percent. This culture shift

results from a holistic approach that places relationships at the forefront and carefully and specifically allocates resources to put the care of students at the heart of change. We believe that this changing school culture connects directly to some of the positive outcomes that have become apparent at East, including increased attendance, graduation rates, and family engagement; improved test scores; and decreased suspensions, behavioral incidents, and dropout rates.

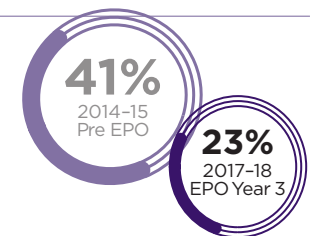
Indicators of Culture Change

Indicator	2014-15	2017-18
Suspensions	2,468	369
Out-of-School Suspensions	1,045	43
Average Daily Attendance	77%	Lower School 90% Upper School 82%

Graduation Rate



Dropout Rate





We have allocated resources toward **building**
and **strengthening** a sense of **community**.

Family and Community Engagement

The change in school culture involves and affects the entire school community, including East staff, scholars and their families, and the larger Rochester community. The FACE committee, formerly the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), has seen a significant increase in family participation and decision making. Our scholars also help to shape the new culture at East. The number of East scholars sitting on governance council and other leadership committees continues to grow.

We have opened East's doors to the community. Much has changed during these first four years of the EPO because we have allocated a number of resources toward building and strengthening community. The support of our many community partners and agencies has helped to provide surrounding families with direct access to resources, such as job fairs, a food pantry, and expanded and new health-related services, to name a few.

Community Partners

University of Rochester

- Margaret Warner Graduate School of Education and Human Development
- School of Nursing's School-Based Health Center
- Eastman Institute of Oral Health
- Pre-College Programs of the David T. Kearns Center for Leadership and Diversity in Arts, Sciences, and Engineering
- Flaum Eye Institute
- Center for Community Health and Prevention's Teen Health and Success Partnership

Foundations

- William and Sheila Konar Foundation
- Farash Foundation
- Greater Rochester Health Foundation

Community Agencies

- Center for Youth
 - Scholar and Family Support Center
 - Alternatives to Suspension
- Champion Academy
 - Extreme Mentoring and Empowerment Initiative

- Connected Communities
- Encompass (Education Success Network)
 - QUEST Program
- Food and Resource Pantry
- Hillside Family of Agencies
 - Work-Scholarship Connection
 - Reinvesting in Youth
- Ibero-American Action League
 - Family Service Assistant Program
 - Proyecto Ayuda Outreach Program
- Monroe County
 - Family Access and Connection Team
 - Probation
- Monroe Community College
 - Liberty Partnerships Program
- North East Area Development
 - Freedom School
- Urban League of Rochester
 - GEAR UP
 - Pathways to Justice Career Program
- Villa of Hope
 - Behavioral Health Services
- YWCA of Rochester and Monroe County
 - Parents as Teachers Program

Academics

Authentic Learning Through Rigorous Instruction

There are **three components** based on rigorous educational research that shape our work on academics at East.



Curriculum

We believe that instruction must start with quality curriculum.

When the EPO began its work, we engaged in a five-year comprehensive curriculum development process that teachers collaboratively create and deliver. Using the research-based framework “Understanding by Design” to create curriculum, students, teachers, and administrators share understanding of what students are learning, why they are learning it, and what additional help students may need. All students receive high-quality curriculum using high-quality materials.



Instruction

Under the EPO, East has adopted a highly intentional instructional process, which provides time for daily collaborative planning among teachers, tight alignment to the curriculum, use of clear learning targets, and techniques that build student engagement. In a recent survey, more than 90 percent of teachers reported using new teaching strategies to enhance student engagement. The majority of these teachers report that students are more engaged in the classroom. Eighty-four percent of teachers feel supported to improve their teaching craft.



Assessment

The EPO has adopted a process of student common formative assessments, which includes student projects, classroom activities, and tests, in order to understand students’ progress and to inform teachers in making adjustments to their planning and decision making. Teachers collaboratively analyze student data in order to plan instructional strategies to meet the specific needs of our scholars.

*Key structures put in place to support academic achievement include increased emphasis and time built into the schedule for **literacy and mathematics**, a deliberate and supportive **ninth-grade academy**, and **academic support periods**, as outlined in the following sections.*

Emphasis on Literacy and Mathematics in Grades 6–9

Literacy

The EPO added both time and staff to build the literacy and mathematic achievement of our scholars. From grades 6 through 9, every East scholar takes an English language arts class as well as a class in literacy. Services in these classes include targeted intervention, remediation, and enrichment based on each individual scholar’s reading score and needs. When we began our work at East, 87 percent of scholars scored in the Below Basic category for state-mandated assessments of literacy, and only 2 percent of scholars scored in the Proficient category. According to the most recent assessment figures, the number of scholars with Below Basic performance has decreased to 59 percent, with more students (11%) performing as Proficient or Advanced.

NY State Testing—English Language Arts
East Lower School (Grades 6–8)

Level	2014–15	2017–18
Level 4 Advanced	0%	2%
Level 3 Proficient	2%	9%
Level 2 Basic	11%	30%
Level 1 Below Basic	87%	59%

Seeing Results

Two groups of scholars have gone through three years in the literacy program at East:

- 47 scholars who began their time at East as sixth graders in 2015 and have progressed in the program through eighth grade.
- 109 scholars who began their time at East as seventh graders in 2015 and have progressed in the program through ninth grade.

These scholars demonstrate the significant improvement that accumulates with time in a quality literacy program.



60 students ranked as Proficient/Advanced

28 students moved levels from Below Basic to Basic

63 students showed improvement in their performance group

5 students showed no change

Baseline testing data at the start of the program indicated only 10 scholars (6%) scored in the Proficient or Advanced range.

- After three years in our literacy program, 60 scholars (38%) scored in the Proficient or Advanced range, while another 28 scholars (24%) moved from Below Basic to Basic.
- Of the remaining 68 scholars, although they did not move an entire performance level, 63 of the 68 showed improvement within their performance group that was well above “typical” growth for a single school year.

In total, 97 percent of scholars who have been in the literacy program all three years have demonstrated significant improvement in their performance.

Mathematics

The data indicates similar results in mathematics, where the number of students performing in the Below Basic category started at 89 percent and has now decreased to 64 percent. Most impressive, the number of students scoring as Proficient or Advanced rose from 1 percent to 18 percent.

NY State Testing—Math

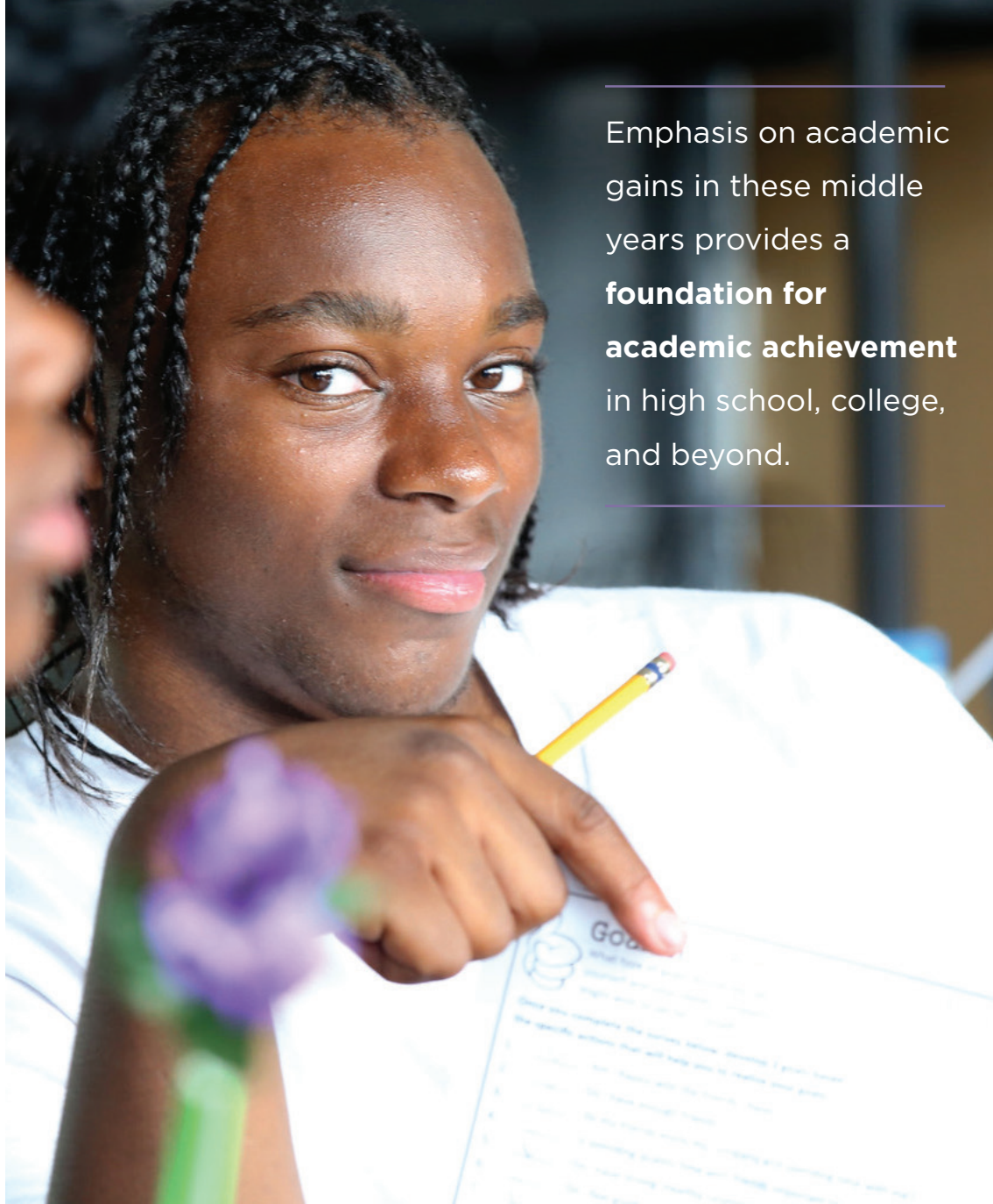
East Lower School (Grades 6–8)

Level	2014–15	2017–18
Level 4 <i>Advanced</i>	0%	2%
Level 3 <i>Proficient</i>	1%	16%
Level 2 <i>Basic</i>	10%	18%
Level 1 <i>Below Basic</i>	89%	64%

Foundation for Academic Achievement

Double periods—144 minutes per day—in literacy and math at grades 6–9 are part of the additional resources critical to scholar success at East. Emphasis on academic gains in these middle years provides a foundation for academic achievement in high school, college, and beyond for these scholars. While much work remains, we are inspired by our students' progress and positive trajectory.

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Ninth Grade Academy

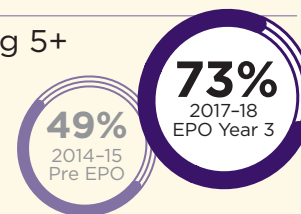
We put a great deal of effort into a successful ninth-grade experience. Extensive research notes the importance of a successful ninth-grade year for students in order to graduate from high school on time. Historically, ninth grade has been a major obstacle for East scholars, as they must for the first time pass classes to move on to the next grade. They also take their first New York State Regents examinations—Algebra and Living Environment. If scholars can finish ninth grade with at least 5 of the 22 credits needed for graduation, they are well positioned to graduate on time.

At East, ninth graders now have their own hallway, their own administrators, and appropriate social-emotional support, creating a nurturing school within a school. They also receive mentorship from select agency partners. These structures and relationships have been effective and an important part of providing a successful foundation for their high school years.



Positioning Students to Graduate

Achieving 5+ Credits



Passing Algebra



Passing Science



The above figures demonstrate credit completion and Regents passing results for ninth graders before the Educational Partnership began compared to year three.

Academic Support Periods

At East, we provide academic intervention services through daily scheduled “support periods.” Almost all of our scholars are eligible for and receive this intervention. Teachers generate specific learning plans for each Upper School scholar based on assessment data. As a result, more East scholars have access to the NYS Regents Diploma and a more rigorous school experience.

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

Grad Class/ Exam	2016	2017	2018	2019
Graduation Rate	40	45	61	TBD
Math	49	47	56	70
Science	36	44	50	56
English Language Arts	31	32	36	55
Global History	17	26	30	36
American History	31	23	33	39

Entering senior year, 56 percent of our most recent graduating class (2018) had passed the gateway examination in mathematics, and

36 percent had passed the English Language Arts (ELA) examination. This class achieved a graduation rate of 61 percent. For the current senior class (2019), 70 percent have passed mathematics, and 55 percent have passed ELA. These data suggest that we will continue to see an upward trend in the graduation rate for the Class of 2019.

While we have seen gains, we continue to experience challenges with social studies. To address this, scholars receive intensive support in retaking exams and, in many cases, can be exempt from one of the social studies examinations depending on their specific graduation pathway.

There is promising news in other areas as well. Last year, 58 percent (91) of our Lower School eighth-grade scholars earned one or more high school credits during their eighth-grade year; 22 percent passed the math Regents; and 44 percent passed the Regents in a language other than English. These scholars enter the Upper School with credits toward graduation.

Since the EPO, Upper School scholars earned 716 college credits in Spanish, and 15 scholars earned the NYSED Seal of Biliteracy, which recognizes graduates who have attained a high level of proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing in one or more languages in addition to English.

Seeing Results

716

college credits in Spanish
 earned by Upper School scholars
 since the EPO

15

scholars have earned the
NYSED Seal of Biliteracy
 since the EPO (*the only students
 in the RCSD to do so*)

58%

of Lower School eighth-grade
 scholars **earned one or more
 high school credits** during
 their eighth-grade year

Engaging Students Through Relevant Instruction



Student survey results provide additional reasons for encouragement. The majority of scholars at East say they look forward to class and at times get so interested in the work that they do not want to stop (70%). Students report that they are interested in and challenged by topics that they have studied (73%), and 91 percent of students believe they have “what it takes” to be successful in school. Teachers offer engaging and culturally relevant lessons. Such instruction results in measurable increases in student engagement and success.

As noted throughout this report, much work remains. We have found that our students often enter East well below expectations in reading and numeracy. We have also found that with the right levels of support, they can become successful scholars, making up lost ground from their previous schooling.

A Critical Investment in Students and Our Community

The University committed a significant investment of resources and human capital to achieve the gains outlined in this report. Many of the systems and resources that support student success were not in place when we began our work at East. We also advocated for essential resources from the district, state, and community partners to transform East. University leaders felt an obligation to students, families, and the community to create this partnership as a model for transforming schools that are persistently failing their students.

The work of school transformation presents many challenges. Our EPO model includes extensive supports and additional resources to help our students “catch up.” Our scholars receive double periods in English language arts/literacy and mathematics through grade 9, which has resulted in extra costs for these subject areas. We have 11 literacy teachers at East and 18 English as a second language (ESL) or bilingual teachers, many more than most high schools. As our students often come to us having experienced trauma in

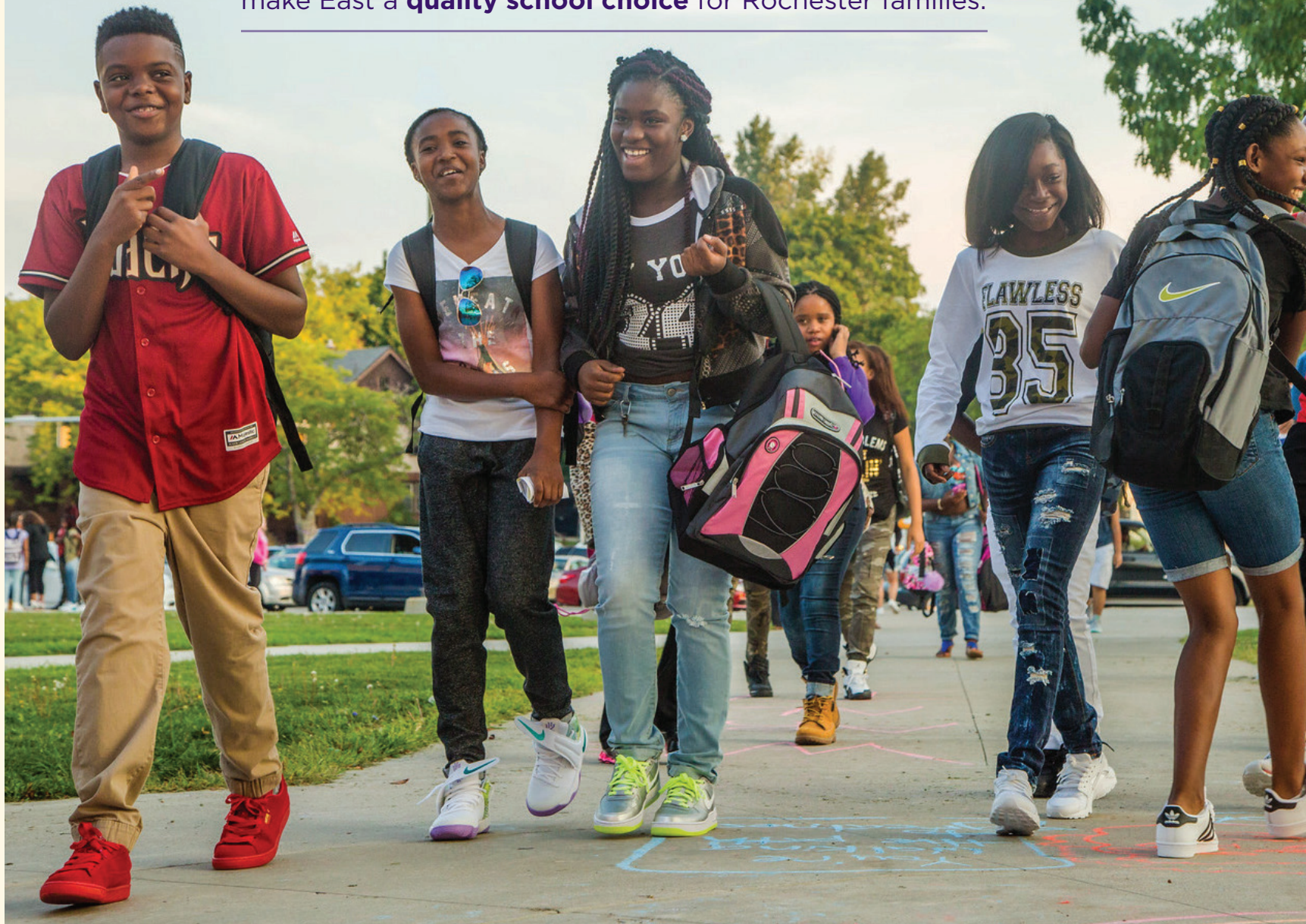
their lives, we have 11 school counselors and 7 social workers to provide social and emotional support. Our teachers develop and deliver high-quality, engaging curriculum. We provide time every day for our teachers to be involved in collaborative planning. We also compensate our staff for extra time and effort. Almost all of our scholars have a support period during which they receive small-group and individual targeted academic support from their teachers. This represents an additional small-group teaching period for almost every teacher.

The EPO’s significant investment went beyond financial resources. We made the most important investment in our people. We brought together the right people—highly qualified teachers and staff with the heart and fortitude to do the work and to re-examine their own practices. The great educators at East design and implement a high-quality program that aligns with a clear vision for academic achievement and preparation of scholars for college and career. Our scholars and staff feel safer and

valued, and they believe they can succeed. These extensive investments have created a positive trajectory for our scholars and our community.

The academic and social-emotional growth of our scholars has been remarkable. We continue to nurture that growth through high-quality programming and intense interventions. We have seen substantial success. However, many areas still require further efforts. We remain committed to continuing our efforts to make East a quality school choice for Rochester families while developing a model for successful urban schools nationwide. The Center for Urban Educational Success (CUES) at the Warner Graduate School of Education and Human Development is capturing these success stories and researching best practices to help us meet our mission. We are grateful for the opportunity to continue this work and address challenges, as we improve educational opportunities for our scholars, their families, and our community.

We remain committed to continuing our efforts to make East a **quality school choice** for Rochester families.



Looking Ahead

We continue to develop and support the practices and strategies outlined in this report by increasing focus in these areas:

- **Improved Attendance**

A focus on attendance remains a top priority and a key to success at East. Although average daily attendance has increased significantly, we still need further improvement. We still have, on average, over 10 percent of our students missing school on any given day and too many students who are chronically absent. We will continue our efforts to improve attendance and reduce chronic absenteeism.

- **Academic Achievement**

Even with significant measurable academic gains at East, we continue to focus on academic achievement with persistence and fidelity to the approaches and techniques that are working. We also continue to assess and make necessary adjustments to overall academic programs, as well as course instruction and teaching practices, to help our students meet the high academic achievement expectations we have of them.

- **Curriculum Sharing**

East teachers and leaders, together with University faculty, embarked on an ambitious overhaul of curriculum for East that included the creation and adoption of high-quality, culturally relevant teaching across all grade levels and subject areas. We have seen promising results and will share these newly developed resources with the Rochester City School District and nationwide for use in other schools.

- **Enhance Community School Model**

East's transition to becoming a community school continues to take shape. It remains important that we continue to enrich East as a community school, where families and the surrounding community have access to a welcoming atmosphere and where the school serves as a community hub. We'll also continue to grow and form partnerships so that we can expand and enhance offerings, such as health-related services, to meet student, family, and community needs and build bridges to community K-6 schools so that more neighborhood families choose East.

- **Build Family and Community Engagement**

Family and community engagement has increased and expanded. We continue to look for ways to grow and build our relationships with families through various events, support, and resources. We also continue to welcome feedback and involve students, families, and the community in important decisions, particularly as we continue our trajectory of success at East.

- **Improve K-12 Urban Schools in Rochester and Beyond**

Grounded in the University's partnership with East, the Center for Urban Education Success (www.rochester.edu/warner/cues) plays a valuable role in the research and work we do to identify, address, and improve systems, practices, and culture at East. The center will continue to expand opportunities to apply quality research-based solutions at East. Equally important, the center will leverage the knowledge gained at East to impact K-12 urban education regionally, nationally, and globally.

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