



College for Certain Chronicle

a publication of East Palo Charter School and East Palo Alto Phoenix Academy



Summer/ Fall 2009

Introducing the Class of 2010!

Sitting here taking college classes as a high school student. Feeling proud and excited, knowing that I am almost there, one step closer, so happy to soon be in college. Not only setting an example for my family, and being the first in my family to graduate, but also being a part of the first graduating class of seniors at East Palo Alto Phoenix Academy.

– Carla Hernandez, EPAPA Class of 2010

I have no one to look up to. My father finished high school...my mom the sixth grade. No one has gone to college in my family and I am the first generation that will go to college. I am very excited but scared because I have to face this alone. Founding Phoenix Academy and being in its first graduating class, it is an honor and great feeling to graduate. I can't wait to feel the college experience and make my family and my teachers proud.

– Elizabeth Garcia, EPAPA Class of 2010



Southern California College Tour

Twelve years ago, East Palo Alto Charter School was founded as an experiment: what would happen if a committed group of families and teachers came together to start a school that would truly meet the educational needs of this community? And three years ago, an additional question was added: what if we expand our school with the explicit goal of preparing our students for college success?

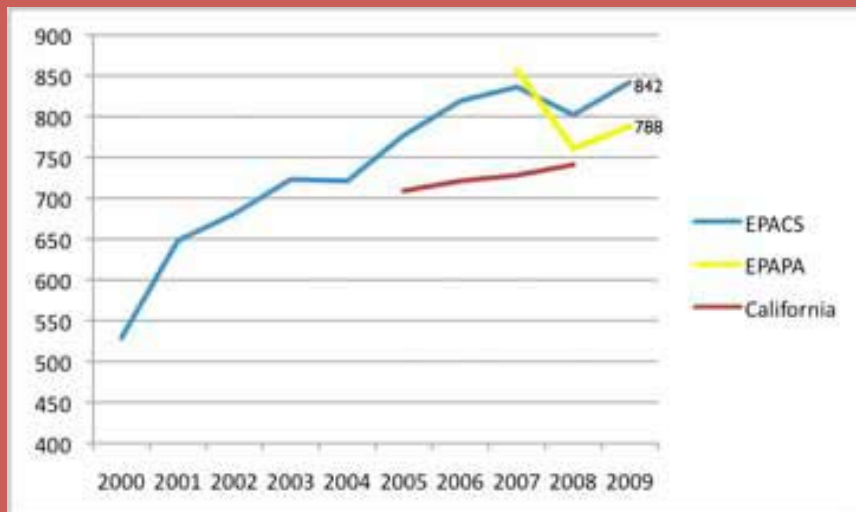
Through their hard work and perseverance, the senior class at East Palo Alto Phoenix Academy has provided a clear and inspiring answer to these questions. In June 2010, they will exchange college acceptance letters for high school diplomas; and then they will set their sights on being the first members of their family to graduate from a four-year college or university. In doing so, they will take another concrete step towards the transformation of East Palo Alto.

Our founding class is already consumed by the frenetic pace of their senior year. All seniors are enrolled in Cañada College classes; many of them are taking additional community college coursework at Cañada's Redwood City campus. Several of our seniors hold jobs (frequently they need to contribute to family finances) or juggle multiple extracurricular activities.

All the while, our seniors are making time to prepare for the ACT and SAT II tests, write personal statements, and narrow down their college lists. This process is made easier by the tremendous support of our students' volunteer College Mentors. These generous individuals – some of whom have been involved with our school as long as our seniors have been at EPACS – serve as sounding boards and cheerleaders to help our students navigate the college application gauntlet.

The road ahead will certainly not be easy, but we are proud of what our students have accomplished thus far. More importantly, we are confident that our students are ready to meet any challenge they may face. As senior Eden Diaz notes, "I'm so pumped, I want to graduate right now! This has been a fun ride with a lot of bumps along the way, but I'm ready to move on."

Historical API



Amazing Test Scores at EPACS and EPAPA

While we don't view our standardized test scores as the "be-all, end-all" of our schools' existence, they are one concrete measure of our students' remarkable success. This year, the students at **EPACS scored a staggering 842** on the STAR test (a school's API, or academic performance index, is measured on a scale from 200 to 1000; the statewide target for all schools is 800). The students at EPAPA also achieved outstanding results: **EPAPA's API of 788** is astonishing considering that our high school was founded just three years ago. This number is even more impressive given that the average API of California high schools with 75%+ minority students is 655. Also noteworthy is the fact that **100% of EPAPA sophomores passed the CAHSEE (California High School Exit Exam) on the first try**, a claim that only a handful of schools in the state can make.

From the Office of the Principals

Dear EPACS Family,

Welcome to a new school year! East Palo Alto Charter School is running at full speed! The staff and students are still buzzing from a spectacular school year last year. We accomplished so much:

- We scored an EPACS record high API of 842 on the STAR test!
- Our charter was unanimously renewed by the district for five more years
- Eighth grader Bianca Rodriguez was awarded a \$2500 Inch College Scholarship.

With such an incredible year behind us, we are determined to make 2009-2010 even better! Here's a glimpse of how we're preparing our students for college this year:

- Proficiency and comfort with "Academic Discourse," the ability to interpret information, think critically, and clearly state your ideas, is a key to success in college. Thus, every classroom will spend extra instructional time engaging students in academic discourse—from complete sentence responses in kindergarten to extended book talks in eighth grade.
- Literacy begins at home! We will host four Family Literacy Nights this year. Teacher, parents, and students will come together to model and practice how to best read and support literacy at home.
- All 8th graders will be guided through a new set of requirements as they prepare themselves for high school and beyond, including community service hours, four exhibitions throughout the year, and a culminating panel presentation in June.

I'm looking forward to sharing our progress with you throughout this school year, and I hope to see you on campus- whether it's at our Pancake Breakfast in October or as a weekly volunteer. On behalf of the entire EPACS community, thank you for your endless amount of support!

Yours,



Laura Ramirez, EPACS Principal

Dear EPAPA Community Members,

Welcome to the 2009-10 school year! East Palo Alto Phoenix Academy is thriving. Since 2006 the program has grown from 22 ninth graders to 150 students in grades 9 through 12. We began with two staff members and now have more than 20 hard-working professionals. Our two-room school house now has seven classrooms, a "Student Union" and a large multi-purpose area. We continue to change the odds for the students we serve: this June our founding class will receive their diplomas and be the first in their families to head to four-year colleges and universities.

We're very excited about our students' achievement. Here are some highlights:

- This past spring, all of our 10th grade students passed the California High School Exit Exam on their first attempt. Although we've looked, we haven't found another school that can say that.
- All of our students continue to visit multiple colleges and universities each year. This past June, with the generous support of our donors, we were able to send groups of students to the East Coast and Southern California, as well as three days of Bay Area college tours.
- In June, our students participated in our first annual exhibition of learning to showcase their exploration of engineering (bridge design), education reform, and epidemiology. As part of their research on the national high school drop-out crisis, our sophomores hosted an education panel which included several experts from secondary and higher education programs in the Bay Area (check out the video at youtube.com/epapictures).

As we celebrate our success, I'm certain this year will be our best ever. Our new staff members and programs have brought more variety and experience to our developing community. Even as we continue to grow and explore locations for a permanent school site, we are preparing our first graduates for admission to the four year programs they have selected. Our expanded academic program and the excitement of graduation have created a unique buzz in East Palo Alto and I invite you all to visit our school and witness the success our students are realizing.

Thanks for being a part of our effort to change the reality for the young people in East Palo Alto.

Sincerely,



Thomas Madson, EPAPA Principal

Program Highlight: Nature Mapping



Before I thought the Baylands were boring, but now I realize there are lots of interesting things to observe and do right next to our school.

– Moises, 5th grade student

Some days you may look for the fourth or fifth graders and find an empty classroom – don't fret, there's a good chance they're out in the Baylands. With their guides from the Reikes Center for Human Enhancement, Ken Clarkson and Mark Batchelder, fourth and fifth grade students spend lots of time studying animal habitats and behavior. Talking with the students about their experience reveals their tremendous wealth of knowledge. Marco reports, "Ken and Mark teach us how to identify different animals by their tracks and scat." They'll tell you about examining kill sites or using soot trays to get a close look at the tracks of the various Bayland critters. But the work doesn't end out in the field. "After we've collected interesting [items]," notes Susanna, "we bring them back to the classroom to study them carefully."

It's clear that the Nature Mapping experience has spurred students to develop a greater appreciation for the natural resources that exist near our school. If you walk out on the trail, you'll notice a sign that says, "Adopted by the Students of East Palo Alto Charter School." And most of all, Nature Mapping helps strengthen our kids' love of learning. Roberto summarizes quite nicely: "We remember and enjoy what we're doing. All of us want to learn more about animals, play games outside, but also work inside and study." Thanks Ken and Mark!

Volunteer Spotlight: Pamela Evers

This summer we were lucky enough to have another team member working with us full-time. Pamela Evers, who will be graduating from Yale this spring, joined us for her summer break. Although she worked in many different classrooms, most of her time was spent supporting Ms. Kling's fifth grade class. She spent lots of time observing and working with students one-on-one or in small groups. Several times, though, she tried her hand teaching the entire class, including a couple German and French language lessons! Pamela really enjoyed her experience – in her words – "learning what it takes to be a teacher... At EPACS, everyone is focused on helping students grow as scholars and as people; it's not just about book smarts." We're sad to see Pamela go, although we're excited for her future, which we hope includes coming back to teach here at EPACS! Thank you for being such a strong member of the EPACS team, Pamela!



Pamela with some of her fifth grade students.

Our Work with Community Partners...

- This year's science fair was a resounding success thanks to the generosity of the employees of **Dionex Corporation**, who donated laptops to help our students complete their research. Dionex team members also served as judges for the fair itself.
- We are proud and grateful that the **Silicon Valley Community Foundation** chose to support our efforts to improve middle school math instruction. SVCF will help us fund our middle school math coach and an instructional fellow this year.
- We continue to develop connections with fellow college prep organizations in East Palo Alto. This past year, we sent some of our students on a week-long Southern California college tour with students from **Foundation for a College Education**. And this November, we will host our second annual joint college fair with the sophomores from **College Track**.
- The **Junior League** continues to support our middle school students as part of our advisory program. The Junior League has been a part of the EPACS family for over six years now!

Upcoming Events

- **September 19, 10am-12pm: LA @ EPA (Latin America at EPACS)** Come see our students celebrate Latin American culture and cuisine.
- **October 24, 10am-12pm: Pancake Breakfast** Join us for world famous pancake as we honor the volunteers who support and sustain our school.
- **October 29, 8:30-10:00am: EPACS-EPAPA Breakfast Tour** Help us expand our community by bringing your friends to see our students in action. RSVP to info@epacs.org.
- **November 14, time TBD: EPAPA-College Track College Fair (at College Track)** Explore a variety of colleges and universities with the sophomores from EPAPA and College Track.
- **December 11, time TBD: EPACS Winter Festival** Celebrate the holidays with food and student performances.

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www.epacs.org
Every Person Will Attend College Someday!

Support Our School

To see our funding needs and support our school(s) visit donate.epacs.org or donate.epapa.org, or send a check to

Development Office
P.O. Box 51717
Palo Alto, CA 94303

Join our mailing list.

If you'd like to hear more about the work we're doing, please email your name and address to newsletter@epacs.org. If you'd like to help us save paper and ink, put "paperless" in the subject line and we'll send you the newsletter electronically.

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College Success for Certain!

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