

THE PIONEER POST



EAST GRAND RAPIDS ALUMNI NEWSLETTER



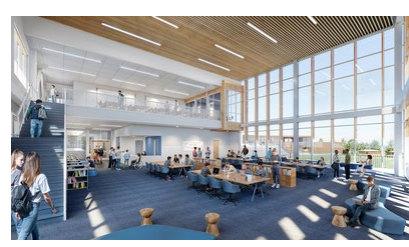
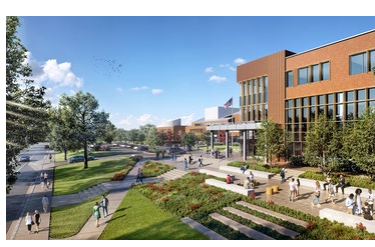
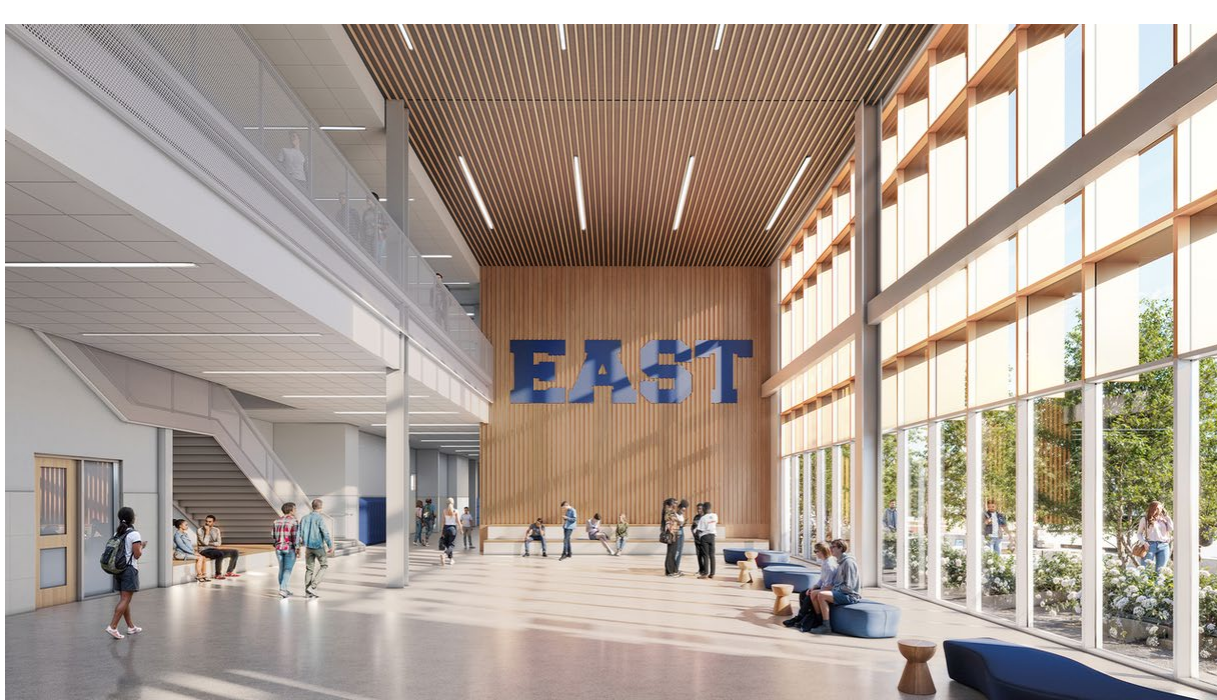
Photos of reunions for the classes of 1954, 1964, 1969, and 2014

Reunions Scheduled for This Summer

There are seven reunions planned for this summer, and fall:

- [1965 September 12-13](#)
- [1975 September 27](#)
- [1985 October 11](#)
- [1990 June 20-21](#)
- [2009 August 9](#)
- [2015 November 26](#)
- [2020 Thanksgiving weekend/TBD](#)

Want help planning your next reunion? Contact Maria Allen, the Foundation's Alumni Relations Coordinator, at mallen@egrps.org. It's time to reconnect, reminisce, and celebrate the memories that shaped you.



Foundation Makes Multi-Million-Dollar Commitment to Help District Transform the High School

In November 2023, East Grand Rapids residents approved a bond program focused on renovating the high school, expanding preschool and childcare opportunities, and supporting infrastructure lifecycle replacements. The budget for the high school transformation alone is more than \$130 million.

Thanks to our donors, the Foundation is making an extraordinary multi-million-dollar commitment to the high school renovation project. Beginning this year, the Foundation plans to contribute \$2.4 million to the project over six years.

"We're proud to provide the support for this historic project that will create a world-class facility for the students of East Grand Rapids," says Foundation Executive Director Amy Stuursma. "These funds will come from the earnings from our endowment. That means anyone who has contributed to our endowment in our more than forty-year history will be part of this effort, and will be part of the new high school. Our contribution will help ensure that the new high school is a teaching and learning environment that is second to none."

"Thank you to all our Foundation supporters for making this transformative commitment possible."

These renderings reflect plans for the high school that were shared with the community at the February 25, 2025 design presentation. Illustrations by MAQE. For more information on the high school transformation, visit www.egrps.org/hsbond.



Winter Sports Highlights: Boys Ski Team Wins East's Record 153rd State Championship!

- **Bowling:** The Boys and Girls Bowling Teams combined for eight match victories this season, led by All-Conference Bowlers Blake Sherman and Emily Grin.
- **Boys Basketball:** "Proud of our student-athletes for their efforts and immense growth throughout our season, punctuated by a great run over our last 10 games," said head coach Mason Theile. "Bright future ahead!"
- **Boys Ski:** The team won East's first state ski championship in 26 years, defeating five-time defending state champion Petoskey on the fifth tiebreaker.
- **Boys Swim and Dive:** At the state finals, the team finished third. Individual East divers finished in 2nd, 4th, and 9th place.
- **Girls Basketball:** "Our amazing group of seniors helped pull our team together and turn a 0-7 start to the season into a winning record to be proud of," said head coach Jayne Hengesbach.
- **Girls Ski:** On the same day the boys won the state championship, the girls were state runners-up, behind only Harbor Springs.
- **Ice Hockey:** The team had one of East's most successful regular seasons ever and then reached the state quarter-finals before losing to the eventual state champion, Orchard Lake St. Mary's. The real highlight, though, was head coach Chris Newton returning to the bench just two weeks after undergoing his second double-lung transplant.

To see the full spring schedule of East Grand Rapids High School sports, visit egrpioneers.org.



EGRHS Production of Charlotte's Web Was "Terrific"

The high school play, "Charlotte's Web," was a highlight of the winter performing arts season, along with holiday concerts from school choirs, bands, and orchestras. At the elementary level, both Breton Downs and Wealthy performed "Finding Nemo Jr" while Lakeside will present "Seussical Jr" later this month. The Middle School Musical, "Cinderella," was staged in November.

The high school's spring musical, "Freaky Friday," will be in the EGRPS Performing Arts Center May 1-3.

This is a transformational year for the performing arts in all our schools. In response to a request from the district, the Foundation is providing nearly \$100,000 per year for the next three years to support a new drama director and performances in all our schools.

Thank you, Foundation donors, for providing this opportunity for all our students to participate in these productions!

A Virtual Cup of Coffee with Brian Gilmore '82

In addition to a lifelong career as a youth counselor, Brian Gilmore is an independent filmmaker. His project, "Dog Days of Winter," won the International Skiing History Association's Film Award for "Outstanding Contribution to the Historical Record of Skiing" and was an official selection for over 20 film festivals across the country and worldwide. He and his daughter are currently working on a short film, "Koans," the story of Janet Gilmore's (EGR '50) six-decade struggle with anorexia. Their book, "Koans: Starving to Find Fulfillment," was recently published and available through the Grand Rapids Library.



You can only have one: Rose's caramel corn, an ice cream cone from Jersey Junction, or a Yesterdog. Which do you choose?

Wow, a very tough question. I'd have to go with Jersey Junction since we both came into existence in 1963 and my mom took me there throughout my childhood until I went on my own with friends throughout the 70s and early 80s. Then it was my turn to take my kids there throughout their childhood during our summer visits from Washington state.

While so much has changed in Gaslight Village, Jersey is a living time capsule and reconnection to growing up in EGR. I remember Mrs. Van Allsburg would get a kick out of saying, "Well, if it isn't little Brian Gilmore," playfully embarrassing me when I walked in with my high school buddies trying to be cool, since she served me my kiddie cone when I needed to step on the stool to look into the ice cream case to make my choice, which I believe was Superman or bubble gum in my single digit years.

What was your path from East Grand Rapids to where you are now in life?

I attended Drake University with a handful of fellow EGR grads. I quickly found my calling in mentoring and counseling youth as well as an interest in film/video production. I started to pursue a graduate degree in Film Production at Boston University, but ended up getting a Masters Degree from Michigan State in Child Development where I met my wife and, to the grief of most my family, was converted from a Wolverine to Spartan loyalist (though I cheer for both unless they are playing each other). We ended up in New Hampshire throughout the mid-90s where I worked as a community outreach worker and counselor for The Mathew Program, a fantastic nonprofit serving youth and families. That opened the opportunity to return to West Michigan for a few years as Executive Director for Camp Blodgett in the late 90's. My wife and I ended up in Bellingham, Washington, in 2000 to be closer to her family and started a family of our own, including our amazing daughter and son. After moving to Bellingham, I served as a program coordinator for Big Brothers Big Sisters and then acquired a Masters in School Counseling from Western Washington University. I continued my youth service career, enjoying work as an elementary school counselor and youth behavioral health counselor from 2004 until just last year.

What specific thing did you learn in East that has enabled you to be successful?

One of the most important things I learned from my upbringing in East was the importance of community, especially in valuing others and making and appreciating connections that provide a deep sense of belonging.

We were so fortunate to have the teachers and opportunities that we had. I truly felt we were all looking out for one another as we grew up in such a special place. I was shaped by that experience. In all of my youth advocacy opportunities, I have tried in turn to contribute to building a community where all participants and staff feel a sense of belonging and value. The sky is the limit if those two components are in place.

What were you like in school?

While I struggled academically, I loved and looked forward to coming to school every day and being with my peers. I felt our class of 1982 had an amazing group of individuals. I did have closer friends but they were very different in many ways from each other and I truly adored everyone. I don't think I could be pocketed as being a part of any clique and hopefully a friend to all. I think it helped that I did sports, band and orchestra, and student council, which opened me up to closer connections with a huge variety of peers.

Did you have a favorite teacher or class?

I adored and am thankful for so many teachers. We really were privileged to have such great educators. While not a teacher, our Vice Principal, Bert Bleke, was an amazing mentor for me. Mr. Bleke saw and encouraged leadership skills he saw in me and like so many other educators at East, actively pushed and took interest in every student's growth and success. I believe he was my advisor during my years as a class officer in student council. My junior year, he noticed that I was not running for any position and he called me to his office to ask why. I gave some cynical, moody teen answer about how student council was more of a popularity contest and officers just wanted the title. He wrote me in to a representative position and said, "Well, you are going to change that." While Barr was coaching on the field, McCoy in the band room, I felt Mr. Bleke was ever present and coaching daily throughout the hallways. Because of him not letting me give up on student council, I stepped out of my comfort zone and ran for Senior Class President the next year, which leads to some of my signature memories at East.

If you had to choose one moment in one location to serve as the signature moment of your East school experience, what would it be?

I knew when I ran for Class President that if elected, I would have to give the student commencement speech, which was very intimidating. However, I knew if I took the challenge, that experience would be something I would be forever proud of. Being Class President senior year was a stepping stone for so much to come. As a 2.4 GPA student, I did not draw any self-confidence from academics but found more beyond the books to feel good about myself and potential. With Bert Bleke's encouragement and belief in me, I was given an opportunity to see myself as a leader, which led to having the confidence to apply to colleges and take many more healthy risks in my life.

What do you know now that you wish you'd known then?

Don't be in such a hurry to move through time. It suddenly starts moving pretty darn fast on its own and all those cliché things adults seemed to constantly repeat actually are nuggets of wisdom.

Do you stay in touch with many people from East Grand Rapids?

Yes, even before Facebook and email, our class has stayed very connected. Many classmates have married and almost all have kept their connection to East, whether they live close or far away. I have way more friends from high school than any other period in my life and a week doesn't go by that I don't connect with someone from East. The more non-East people I have talked to, the more I realize how rare this is and what an ideal childhood community we lived in.

What advice do you have for young East alums who are just starting out?

Use your privilege and opportunities you have been gifted to do good in the world. Measure your value by the impact you make for other people's lives and well being.

Who else would you like us to have a virtual cup of coffee with?

All my classmates have valuable life insights and wonderful life experiences. My longest friendship started in a sandbox by Heather Pool when we were two: Cantor Randy Herman, Class of '82 continues to have a fascinating life.





Bonus question: What are you glad we didn't ask you about?

Who were the masterminds and inside collaborators to our senior prank?

To see more Virtual Cup of Coffee alumni interviews, visit the [Alumni Profiles page](#) on our website.



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