

WINTER EDITION / 2024

# YOUR SCHOOLS

DEC. 2024

"Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall."

WE ARE ALL BOUND FOR GREATNESS !!

ENROLLED - ENLISTED - EMPLOYED



THORNTON TOWNSHIP  
**DISTRICT 205**  
HIGH SCHOOLS

PEACE



CENTER



Thorntide



Thornton



Thornwood

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*Nina Graham*

**BOARD PRESIDENT**

We want our students to be aware that they have career options, so they feel empowered and have the confidence of knowing they are prepared for future opportunities. To help turn this belief into a reality, District 205 developed a Career and Technical Education (CTE) program. Students who participate in the CTE classes acquire knowledge, skills, and experience in a variety of fields including: precision manufacturing, cosmetology, barbering, electricians training with the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, woodshop, and auto shop. These training programs are rigorous and the topics covered are based on current industry standards for the subject area. The high caliber of training students receive will give them an advantage as they pursue their careers.

Our students are able to participate in a wide array of extracurricular activities and special events that are educational, interesting, and beneficial. One such event was our 3E Expo held in October 2024. This was an opportunity for our students and their parents to explore career avenues as well as obtain information about colleges, universities, vocational programs, military service, and more. You can learn more about the expo in this newsletter.

A sign on a fitness center marquee read, "Progression, not perfection." At District 205, we strive to instill this motivational message in our students. While we encourage all of our students to achieve academically, we also feel it is important that they enjoy their journey. The BOE is committed to doing whatever is necessary to help our students have a positive and productive high school experience.

*Nina Graham*

Ms. Nina Graham  
School Board President

## Dear Reader,

I enthusiastically greet you on behalf of the School District 205 Board of Education (BOE). I always look forward to sharing information about what is happening within our schools and educational programs.

District 205 continues to take an innovative approach to how we educate and train our students. We realized long ago that we needed to "think outside of the box" when it comes to the academic curricula, career training programs, and the overall educational experiences that we provided. The BOE works in conjunction with the District 205 administrative team to ensure our students are **enrolled** in college or a vocational training program, **enlisted** in the military, or are **gainfully employed** when they graduate.

Over the years, our methods for helping our students achieve this goal have changed and I can honestly say the change has been for the better. The courses and vocational programs we offer have evolved as the knowledge and skills needed in the workplace have evolved. We are also more attuned to our students' diverse interests and therefore, we have focused our attention on what they need to be successful in school and beyond. As a result, District 205's educators, administrators and BOE collaborate to offer academic curricula and educational programs that are relevant and dynamic.

## DISTRICT 205 SCHOOL BOARD OF EDUCATION



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Board Vice President



**Dr. Kara  
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**Mr. Ray C.  
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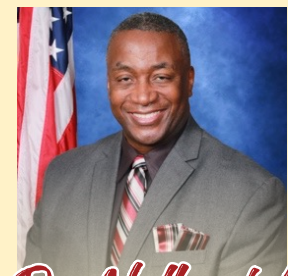
**Mr. Stanley H.  
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Board Member



**Mr. Stafford  
Owens**  
Board Member



*Dr. Nathaniel  
Cunningham, Jr.*

**SUPERINTENDENT**



# Second Annual 3E Expo Showcase Pathways to Success

Mary Ann Thornton



a part of or job opportunities and our armed forces,” said Shafon J. Dinnwiddie, a Thornton parent. “I’m grateful to District 205 for providing the 3E Expo for our students.”

Students enjoyed a lively mixer that fostered networking and team building, while workshops offered valuable insights into professional and personal development. Vendors, educators, and community partners collaborated to create a comprehensive support system, showcasing the district’s commitment to preparing students for a dynamic and competitive future.

On Thursday, October 24, 2024, the Tinley Park Convention Center buzzed with excitement as Thornton Township High School District 205 held its second annual 3E Expo. Designed to empower students, families, and educators, the event focused on preparing attendees for success in life after high school—whether through college (**enrolled**), military service (**enlisted**), or entering the workforce (**employed**).

The day-long event featured an array of activities aimed at engaging and informing participants. Workshops addressed topics such as resume building, career readiness, and college preparation, while a robust post-high school options fair allowed students to connect with representatives from colleges, vocational programs, military branches, and local employers.

“The expo has helped my mindset as far as getting ready for college,” said Ivan Walker, a senior at Thornton Township. I applied to a few universities for early action, but my takeaway today is to prepare for financial aid and get mentally prepared for my future.”

With its focus on enrolled, enlisted, employed, the expo underscored the district’s dedication to fostering well-rounded, career-ready graduates.

“Our hope is for our students to leave the 3E Expo prepared to make plans for their future,” said Theresa King, College & Career Counselor at Thornton Township High School.

“This event is all about expanding horizons for our students,” said Dr. Nathaniel Cunningham, Jr., District 205 Superintendent. “We want them to leave here feeling confident about the paths available to them after high school. They received help with school applications, they learned about induction into the military, and they learned about opportunities in the job market.”

Parents also had opportunities to engage, with dedicated sessions on navigating post-secondary options and understanding the financial aid process. The FAFSA crash course proved particularly popular, equipping families with the tools they need to secure financial support for higher education.

“A lot of our students don’t get out to see the different colleges and universities they could be





# Student Board of Education

## *Leading with Purpose and Passion*



These programs bring the community together to address challenges and encourage unity. Additionally, the SBOE advocated for Studio 205, a cosmetology/barbering program designed to provide hands-on career development opportunities for students. The board is hopeful this is just the beginning, with plans to introduce more career-driven initiatives in the future.

Being a part of the SBOE is not just about service—it's also about growth. Members gain valuable skills in leadership, communication, and teamwork that prepare them for success in the workforce, higher education, and life beyond high school.

The Student Board of Education (SBOE) of District 205 is a dedicated group of student leaders committed to representing their peers and making a positive impact in their schools and community. Guided by their vision of creating a high-quality and well-rounded high school experience, the SBOE prioritizes humility, hard work, and collaboration in all they do.

Through their mission, the SBOE acts as a bridge between students, the superintendent, and the School Board of Education. Their leadership extends beyond representation; they actively work to enhance their schools and create opportunities for students to succeed. By hosting impactful community events and leading initiatives, the SBOE continues to leave a lasting mark on the district.

Among their most notable achievements are the signature events Hands Across Harvey and Breaking the Cycle.



The SBOE embodies what it means to lead with purpose, demonstrating that with dedication and vision, students can shape a BIGGER and BETTER future for themselves and their community.

## *Save the Date*

### **Breaking the Cycle A Mental Health Awareness Event**

**Saturday**

**March 15, 2025**

**1:00 to 5:00 p.m.**

**Thornton Township  
High School Fieldhouse**

*This event is hosted by the District  
205 Student Board of Education*



# Superintendent's Message



*Dr. Nathaniel  
Cunningham, Jr.*

## SUPERINTENDENT

Welcome to School District 205's Winter 2024 **Your Schools** newsletter! I'm delighted that you are taking time out of your busy schedule to learn about how we are educating and serving our students.

The District's administrators, educators, and staff, in partnership with the District 205 Board of Education, continue to diligently pursue our mission to ensure all of our students are either **enrolled** in college or a vocational training program, **enlisted** in military services, or gainfully employed when they graduate. We do this by providing our students with the academic curriculum and educational opportunities they need to be successful now and in the future.

Carrying out our mission requires us to regularly solicit input and ideas from our students, educators, administrators, and the school board. By fostering open communication we are able to identify needs, wants, and opportunities that will enhance our students' educational environment and experiences. We also rely on data, assessments, and observations to determine how we should best utilize our resources.

The District has been focusing on infrastructure improvements and safety and security on our campuses. We initiated a major project to upgrade our heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems and replace the roofs on our school buildings. We also took significant action to advance the implementation

of our Safe Schools Initiative which sets forth our security plans, procedures and protocols. You can learn more about these important projects and how they will positively impact the health and safety of our students, staff, and visitors in this newsletter.

In addition to providing you with more details about the above topics, we are proud to share information about our three high schools - Thornridge, Thornton, and Thornwood, as well as our Outlook Academy, and Peace Center.

We continue to develop our Career and Technical Education (CTE) program. The purpose of the CTE program is to provide specific career skills, integrated core academics, and technical knowledge that prepares students for industries and professions.

We are always pleased when our students succeed. However, we realize there may be students who face challenges or experience circumstances that may impede their ability to consistently attend classes and achieve academically. Research has shown there is a strong correlation between attendance, mental health, and high school achievement. We encourage students and/or their parents or caregivers to contact their school social worker or notify the students' division teacher if additional academic or personal support is needed.

District 205 is always committed to working with the Board of Education, our community stakeholders, and our students to carry out our mission. If you have any suggestions or ideas that will be of service to our students, we welcome you to share them with us.

Dr. Nathaniel Cunningham, Jr.  
Superintendent

**“ By fostering open communication we are able to identify needs, wants, and opportunities that will enhance our students' educational environment and experiences. ”**



# Students Learn and Get Licensed in a Lucrative Field That They Love

Cassandra Griffin, CPCC, DTM



What was your favorite subject when you were in high school? It's not likely you responded that it was your cosmetology or barbering classes. This may be the case for the School District 205 students who are currently enrolled in our new cosmetology and barbering program, called Studio 205.

Establishing this program is another way for us to fulfill our mission for our students to be **enrolled** in college or a vocational program, **enlisted** in military service, or be gainfully **employed** after they graduate.

The vision for the Studio 205 program began in 2018 when the Student Board of Education expressed an interest in careers in the cosmetology and barbering fields. Those students helped to spark the highly anticipated programs that opened to students in August 2023. Although there were initially only 24 slots available to enter the two year program, more than 100 students applied. There are now 48 students in the program from all three District 205 high schools, including 24 students who are in their first year of training and 24 who are in their second year.



In 2025, the first class of Studio 205 students will graduate and they will have the experience and training to immediately seek work in their chosen lucrative field. These students will have earned six credits toward the number they need to graduate while also completing the requisite 1500 hours of training needed to become a licensed professional cosmetologist or barber.

The program trains students on the fundamentals, gives them opportunities to earn credentials, and helps them to get comprehensive hands-on experience. Students got to hone and demonstrate their skills in October 2024 when they offered free haircuts or "express" facials during the District 205 Parent Teacher Conference. In November 2024, students began offering salon services to the general public. In addition, the students have had opportunities to attend national beauty industry shows, workshops, and competitions and to learn from guest speakers who come to share their expertise.

Ms. Leah Pietraszewski, Division Leader for Family & Consumer Sciences and Cosmetology and Barbering, enthusiastically said, "The program has generated a lot of interest among our student body." She added, "The students in the program love what they do, and it is evident; you can see it on their faces and by how much they work to learn their craft."

Ms. Pietraszewski is not just the Division Leader for the program; she is also a salon client. She proudly declared,





“Without hesitation, I have allowed students to not only style my hair, but to cut and dye my hair, too.”

Studio 205 is located in Thornridge High School and the program is taught by two incredibly talented and experienced instructors. Ms. Marcia White is the cosmetology instructor and Ms. Ayana Goodwin is the barbering Instructor.

Ms. Tocara Hill is the Studio Manager and she oversees the day-to-day operations of Studio 205 by ensuring that the state-of-the-art and sleek space is well-maintained and the inventory is organized.

News about Studio 205 has spread beyond School District 205. The program was featured in an in-depth article in the Daily Southtown newspaper titled, “Thornton District 205

Cosmetology and Barbering Program in High Demand” on September 6, 2024. The program has also garnered support from the local business community. It was the recipient of a generous donation of products from Miele Organics, which is a global, multi-million dollar hair care brand. The founder of the company is Monique Rodriguez, a graduate of Thornton High School. The donated products were showcased at Studio 205’s ribbon cutting ceremony.

We hope you will also support the Studio 205 program by scheduling an appointment with one of our talented students. You can do so by going to this website: <https://trstudio205.setmore.com/studio> or by scanning the QR code below.



*Source: Stevens, Olivia. “Thornton District 205 Cosmetology and Barbering Program in High Demand.” Daily Southtown. September 6, 2024, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/2024/09/06/thornton-district-205-cosmetology-and-barbering-program-in-high-demand/>*



# Building a Brighter Future Investing in Capital Improvements to Enhance Our Campuses for Generations Ahead

**Beverly Moore**



You may have noticed much work happening in and around our buildings. The health, well-being, and safety of the school communities that make up District 205 are vital to raising future leaders. Modifications are either complete or in progress thanks to a \$57 million investment approved by the board and community, of which \$20 million will be reimbursed by the federal government. They are ongoing to ensure our students, faculty, and staff function in a well-maintained environment.

“We are committed to fostering environments that support our students, staff, and broader school communities. The ongoing capital improvements at Thornridge, Thornton Township, and Thornwood High Schools reflect our dedication to enhancing the physical infrastructure of our schools and the health, well-being, and safety of everyone who walks through our doors. We believe these upgrades are investments in our community’s future, creating schools that our students and families can be proud of for years to come,” said Ms. Nina Graham, District 205 School Board President.

This is just the beginning. These improvements are not just about the present but about shaping a brighter future for our school communities. We can look forward to the long-term benefits these changes will bring.

The following are some highlights of the ongoing improvements:

## **Completed Projects** *New Roofs*

During the summer, roof work was done at all three schools, including a full scope of work at Thornwood, as pictured below. Both Thornridge and

Thornton have received new roofs on certain buildings, with plans to continue the project this school year. New roofs at our schools are necessary to protect against the elements and maintain the structural integrity of the buildings for years to come.

## **HVAC Ensuring Air Quality**

The COVID-19 pandemic and other environmental allergens make air quality a safety issue. Classrooms at Thornridge and Thornwood have been updated with new ventilators with high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters, among other improvements to interior infrastructure.

## **Projects in Progress** *Strengthening Campus Safety* *New Control Access Gates for Safer Campuses*

Campus security is mission critical. We’re also excited to share important updates on security improvements coming to all campuses. The Control Access Gates project is a big step toward creating a safer environment for everyone on campus, and we want to keep you informed about what’s





happening. Here's a look at some of the new features:

### ***Improved Access with Proximity Cards and Mobile Phones***

The new system allows staff and authorized personnel to easily access campus with their existing proximity cards, ensuring a seamless transition. Plus, the system now offers access via mobile phones. This mobile option adds convenience and enhanced security, using built-in authentication processes by phone. Only authorized users can enter the buildings, making our campuses even more secure.

### ***Traffic Flow and Safety Signage Upgrades***

We've changed traffic patterns to improve safety at our school campuses. Soon, new directional signs and road markings will guide traffic more effectively through campus and ensure drivers follow the proper routes to prevent accidents or confusion. The road marking process is expected to take approximately 3 to 4 weeks, depending on weather conditions.

During this time, some areas may have temporary traffic signs. New "Do Not Enter" and "One-Way" signs will be placed strategically to prevent unauthorized or unsafe traffic movements, especially in areas where cars may have entered incorrectly. We appreciate your patience as we make these improvements.

### ***Enhanced Visitor Access and Security Monitoring***

We are also implementing a new visitor process. Visitors will connect with a security guard at the entry gate when they arrive. After verification, the gates will open, allowing access. Visitors who cannot be verified will be directed to exit through a designated rejection lane, with mobile security personnel available to assist if needed. This new setup will help maintain a secure

campus while minimizing disruptions for staff and students. In addition, we are installing cameras at the gates to record license plates of entering vehicles. If needed, we'll be able to share this information with local law enforcement, further supporting the safety of our school community.

### ***Gate Operations During School Hours***

To accommodate daily routines, the access gates remain open during drop-off and pick-up times but close once the school day begins. Only those with authorized access will be permitted on campus during school hours. Any visitors arriving during this time will follow the validation process mentioned above.

These improvements will significantly enhance safety across our school communities. Changes will allow us to maintain tighter control over who has access to our campuses while providing a more convenient experience for our staff and students.

## **Future Projects**

### ***New Football and Soccer Fields***

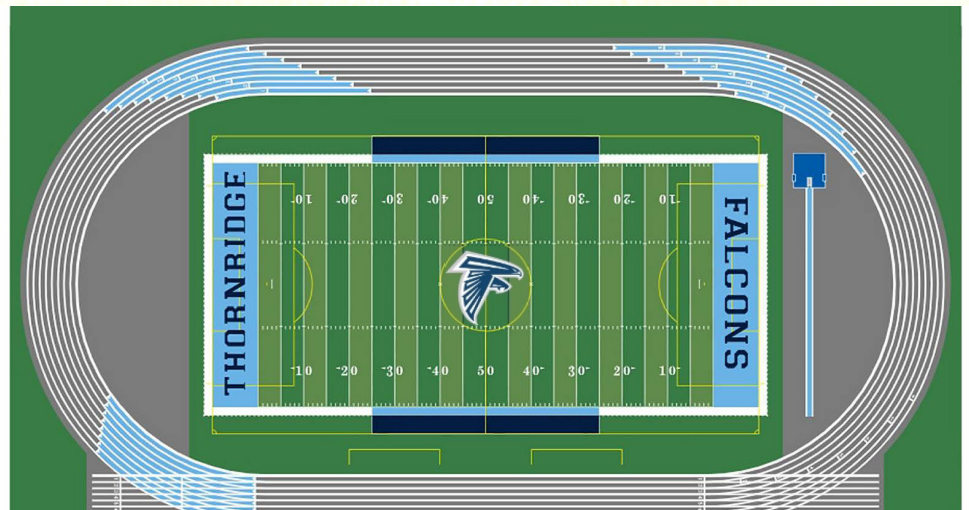
Renovations are underway to the football and soccer fields to improve the market value of our community and ensure compliance with IHSA standards. The renovation includes installing new turf and fencing around all the fields.

The project will begin with site work, including demolition, installation of an extensive drainage system, and reconstruction of the ground. Updated tracks, coating, stripping, and lining will be installed along with the new turf and fencing. Lastly, the speakers and scoreboards will be upgraded.

These field renovations will position schools to host tournaments and competitions. The project is expected to begin within the school year (projected to start in Spring 2025). Weather and permit delays could impact the timeline.

"Our commitment to our mission is evident in these capital improvements, designed to address the needs of our students, staff, and community members. The upgrades at Thornridge, Thornton Township, and Thornwood are about more than aesthetics—they're about creating secure, welcoming spaces supporting academic and personal growth. We look forward to seeing how these improvements will enhance the educational experience and serve as a testament to our district's promise to provide safe and inspiring environments," said Dr. Nathaniel Cunningham, Jr., District 205 Superintendent.

***Field Design provided by  
Beynon - A Tarkett Sports Company***







**Dr. Justin Moore**  
Principal - Thornridge

# Thornridge News

## Thornridge Bonfire Ignites Warmth, Reflection, and Fun



On Friday, October 18, 2024, Thornridge High School came alive with the glow of its annual Bonfire, a cherished tradition hosted by the S.A.V.E. Committee and the NHS Club. Students enjoyed an unforgettable evening complete with a s'more kit, hot chocolate, and their choice of a popcorn bag or Rice Krispy treat.

The event began at 4:30 PM in the school courtyard, where soft music set the tone for a relaxed yet spirited atmosphere. Students engaged in tug-of-war competitions, danced to



lively tunes, and shared laughter over warm cups of hot chocolate. The cool fall weather added to the cozy vibe, making the evening a perfect mix of fun and fellowship.

As the night unfolded, the true heart of the event emerged. Students gathered around the crackling bonfire, each holding an orange paper inscribed with personal burdens they wished to release—whether it was anxiety, procrastination, or uncertainty about the future. To the tune of Usher's "Burn," they cast their worries into the flames, symbolizing a fresh start and the shedding of the past year's challenges.



The Bonfire wasn't just an event; it was a moment of connection, reflection, and renewal. Thornridge High School students left the evening with lighter hearts and stronger bonds, ready to embrace the new school year.

If you missed it, mark your calendar for next year—this is an experience you won't want to miss again!





# Thornridge News

## OCTOBER FEST



On Tuesday, October 29th, Thornridge High School, in collaboration with the Dolton Park District and Dolton Library, held its second annual October Fest for students and community alike.

Parents and children of all ages came to TR dressed for the occasion, enjoying all the festivities. Attendees painted face masks, decorated pumpkins, received

cloud slime provided by our Science Club, listened to spooky storytelling, and played a variety of festive games. However, the night's biggest hit was arguably the haunted house, and even though that was pretty scary, the TR gymnasium proved to be a safe, happy space for all.



## Thornridge's AVID Program Celebrates Milestones and Plans for More

### Program Stats

- 11 Sections, 227 students
- 6 Elective Teachers and 25 Site Team Members



The AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) Program at Thornridge High School continues to shine as a hub for student growth and achievement.

This year, the program hosted its largest Back-to-School BBQ yet, bringing together students, parents, and staff for a day of connection and celebration. AVID students also explored college opportunities with visits to Loyola University and Northeastern Illinois University. Additionally, two Period-by-Periods sessions during the first semester showcased "Assessment through

Inquiry," highlighting AVID's commitment to academic excellence. Fundraising efforts have been remarkable, with \$4,000 raised for Senior AVID Scholarships and an additional \$1,000 in reserves. Last year, four seniors were awarded scholarships, and two others received special acknowledgments—traditions the program hopes to continue and expand.



Exciting plans lie ahead, including a December AVID Alumni Panel, four career-based field trips (including stops at the cadaver lab, Chicago Wolves, McDonald's Headquarters, and NEIU), and the much-anticipated AVID Week from January 22-26. Leadership Days at Camp Manitouqua in May and the Annual AVID Awards Ceremony on May 1st promise to end the school year on a high note.

Thornridge High School's AVID Program is proud of its accomplishments and looks forward to more opportunities to support and celebrate its students.





**Todd Whitaker**  
Principal - Thornton

# Thornton Township News

## Thornton's AVID Program Highlights Excellence

### Program Stats

- 10 Sections, 183 students
- 5 Elective Teachers and 15 Site Team Members

Thornton Township High School's AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) Program continues to inspire and prepare students for academic and career success through a variety of enriching activities.



Loyola University Chicago, Governors State University, and North Central College, have offered students a firsthand look at campus life and opportunities for higher education.

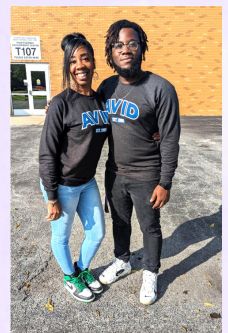


Recent guest speakers, including Judge Walker-Judge, Calvin Townsend III, Jen Lavigne from the South Holland Public Library, and representatives from Northwestern University, have provided valuable insights into education, career pathways, and personal growth.

Field trips to top institutions such as the University of Illinois at Chicago, Roosevelt University, Northeastern University,

In addition, the program hosts special events, including college and career representative visits, service projects, and campus tours, ensuring that students are well-prepared for their futures.

Thornton Township's AVID Program remains a shining example of how dedication and support can shape the leaders of tomorrow.



## Halloween Event

At Thornton, the Infant Care Center held their 4th annual Halloween event. 19 children received snack bags and books thanks to Principal Whitaker, school staff, including the library staff.

Here are pictures of ICC's Halloween event.







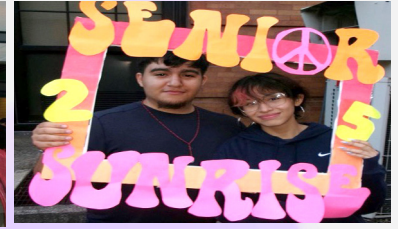
# Thornton Township News

## Senior Sunrise



TTHS Student Council arranged its first Senior Sunrise Event, a tradition in the making. The morning consisted of the class of 2025 gathering with just about 100 attendees taking a moment to reminisce and take in the past three years of their high school experience.

A special thanks to Principal Todd Whitaker for bringing the students' vision for Senior Sunrise to life and providing food and drinks for this event. Without his generosity, the senior class would miss the opportunity for collective bonding.



## Think Pink & Fight



On October 26th, the Thornton Township Chapter of the National Honor Society partnered with Downs Fitness to host its 2nd Annual Think Pink & Fight Like a Wildcat Breast Cancer event. The successful event drew in more than 100 parents, students, and staff from all district schools, as well as community members. District 205's board president Ms. Nina Graham and board member Mr. Ray Banks also participated in the breast cancer event.







**Don Holmes**  
Principal - Thornwood

# Thornwood News

## Males 2 Men Mentoring Seminar



Thornwood male students participated in Males 2 Men Mentoring Seminar at Chicago State University. The goal of the seminar was to provide a platform in which adult men could mentor young male students through strategic activities and challenges, and small group discussions.

## Thunderbird Football Program Wins Championship Trophy



Congratulations to the Thunderbird Football Program on their win of this year's District 205 Championship trophy. A special congratulations is extended to first year head coach Tremaine Weaver for leading the program to a strong season finish.







# Thornwood News



## AVID®

## Thornwood's AVID Program Celebrates A Year of Growth and Opportunity

### Program Stats

- 8 Sections, 170 students
- 4 Elective Teachers and 10 Site Team Members

The AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) Program at Thornwood High School has had an impactful year, offering students opportunities to grow academically, socially, and professionally.



Recent highlights include a campus tour and four in-class college visits, along with a Social Emotional Learning (SEL) presentation by NAMI Chicago. Students also participated in a Professional Learning Module (PLM) and were celebrated alongside their teachers during special recognition events. Additionally, AVID recruiting efforts have been underway, ensuring the program continues to empower more students.

Looking ahead, exciting opportunities await at Thornwood High School, including a Michuda career trip and partnership, two campus tours, and a career field trip scheduled for the spring. Sustained professional development for AVID educators and Leadership Days at Camp Manitouqua in April will further enhance the program's impact.

Thornwood's AVID Program remains a cornerstone of student success, fostering leadership, college readiness, and personal development.



## Thornwood's IB Program

Pictured are 35 inductees of Thornwood's IB program. The ceremony was held November 6th. Congratulations Thunderbirds!







# Outlook Academy

## Outlook Academy Helps Students Succeed

**Cassandra Griffin, CPCC, DTM**

School District 205's educators, staff, and administrative team wish every student who enrolls in Thornridge, Thornton, or Thornwood high schools as a freshman would thrive personally, excel academically, and earn their high school diploma four years later. Unfortunately, some students may experience obstacles and challenges that may impede their ability to successfully earn the credits required to graduate during the traditional timeline.

The District's Outlook Academy program addresses these issues by encouraging, assisting, and supporting juniors and seniors who are at risk for falling behind academically or dropping out of school. This unique program is located at South Suburban College (SSC) and is open to students ages 17 to 22. Since its inception, Outlook Academy has provided a pathway for students to complete the academic requirements to earn their high school diploma.

Just like students who attend the District's three high schools, the ultimate goal for Outlook Academy students is for them to be **enrolled** in college or a vocational training program, **enlisted** in military service, or be gainfully **employed** when they graduate. To achieve this goal, Outlook Academy teachers and staff are committed to giving each student focused attention so they can achieve academically and develop personally. Each student follows an individualized plan which may include coursework in English, science, business, accounting, math, social studies, reading, health/physical education, and art. Students also have access to educational tools, resources, and activities as well as to counselors and adult transition support.

We believe our students do better if they have the positive support of a parent or caregiver. To encourage their involvement, Outlook Academy held a Back to School Open House in September 2024. This event gave parents and caregivers an opportunity to become more familiar with the program, meet the staff, and ask questions. Several people indicated that they were impressed with the program. We help students and parents stay abreast on an ongoing basis via our Outlook Academy newsletter which details what students are learning in each of their subjects and provides other helpful and relevant information.

In addition to attending classes and completing assignments, students who are enrolled in Outlook Academy have the opportunity to:

- Participate in SSC's certification programs and take college courses.
- Attend District 205's 3E [Enrolled/Enlisted/Employed] Expo, which enables students and their parents to meet representatives from a variety of businesses, colleges, trade schools, and the military.
- Receive assistance with completing and submitting the Free Application for Financial Student Aid (FAFSA) and taking the SAT - both of which are required by District 205 and the State of Illinois in order to graduate.

If you are a District 205 student or a parent/caregiver of a District 205 student who may benefit from what the Outlook Academy has to offer, you can visit the Outlook Academy section on District 205's website, under programs (district205.net). For example, you will find our comprehensive Outlook Academy Operational Manual and an informative podcast about the program that was featured on the Deep Dive show.

## Special Olympics

### Moments from Floor Hockey Games







# Peace Center

## Transformative Journey to Ghana

**Mary Ann Thornton**

From June 21-29, 2024, the PEACE Center embarked on a historic journey to Ghana, marking a pivotal chapter in its nine-year history. The trip, which included one staff member, Mr. Tyran Cox-Bey, six students, and Mrs. Bernadette Lawrence, provided an unparalleled opportunity to explore heritage, culture, and self-discovery.

The trip was made possible with the permission and support of the Thornton Township High School District 205 Board of Education and was coordinated by Mr. Brett Fickes, District 205's Associate Superintendent, Curriculum and Instruction, and Bishop Davis of Sankofa Us. The initiative highlighted the importance of connecting students with Africa, a goal deeply aligned with the PEACE Center's mission of fostering personal growth and transformation.

### Exploring Ghana

During their time in Ghana, the group experienced a rich itinerary that showcased the country's historical and natural wonders. Highlights included:

- A city tour of Accra and a visit to the W.E.B. DuBois Museum.
- Exploring the Kakum Rain Forest and Assin Manso.
- A tour of the Aburi Botanical Gardens.
- Emotional visits to the Slave River and the "Door of No Return" at Cape Coast, including the historical slave dungeons.
- Interactions with villagers in Abrem Saaman.

These experiences provided a profound connection to history, offering students an opportunity to reflect on their roots and shared heritage while marveling at Ghana's vibrant culture and natural beauty.

The journey to Ghana was more than just a trip abroad—it was a transformative experience that broadened horizons and created lasting memories. From meeting Ghanaian peers and visiting schools to engaging with Chiefs, Kings, and Queen Mothers, students were immersed in a world that inspired personal growth and self-confidence.

### A Life-Changing Experience

For many students, the trip represented a chance to step outside their everyday challenges. Teachers and staff observed remarkable changes upon their return. One probation officer shared a powerful story of a student whose life had been profoundly impacted by the journey. The student now demonstrates leadership in group discussions and a renewed focus on achieving his goals.

This shared experience also helped bridge cultural gaps, fostering a deeper understanding of the connections between Black Americans and Africans. By breaking down stereotypes and misconceptions, the trip empowered students to view themselves as part of a larger global narrative.



### Looking Ahead

Inspired by the success of this trip, the PEACE Center is exploring future travel opportunities. While no specific plans have been finalized, discussions with Sankofa Us and a focus on securing funding for the 2025/2026 school year are underway.



### A Message of Hope and Empowerment

Reflecting on the trip's significance, the PEACE Center's director, Mr. Cox-Bey, shared: "The PEACE Center's trip to Ghana was more than a journey; it was a bridge connecting our students to the world, and to who they truly are. This transformative experience highlighted the importance of embracing our shared humanity and reinforced the PEACE Center's mission to empower students through education, fostering growth, leadership, and a commitment to making a positive impact in their communities and beyond."

As the PEACE Center continues to build on this milestone, its commitment to providing students with life-changing opportunities remains steadfast, ensuring that each step forward leads to a brighter future.





# District 205 Hosts Successful Voter Registration Drive

Mary Ann Thornton



In a resounding demonstration of civic engagement, Thornton Township High School District 205 successfully conducted a district-wide Voter Registration Drive on Tuesday, September 24, 2024. The initiative, led by Dorothy Bryant, provided students across Thornridge, Thornton, and Thornwood High Schools the opportunity to prepare for their future roles as informed voters.

At Thornwood High School, the library buzzed with activity as eligible students took advantage of this valuable opportunity. Beginning at 8:00 a.m. and running throughout the school day, the registration process was designed to be efficient and accessible. Students completed the necessary steps to ensure their voices will be heard in future elections.

fostering a sense of responsibility and excitement about contributing to the democratic process. Dorothy Bryant, the event coordinator, expressed pride in the students' enthusiasm. "It's inspiring to see so many young people taking their first steps toward civic engagement. This is not just about registering to vote; it's about empowering our students to understand their influence in shaping their communities and their futures."

As the district continues to encourage civic responsibility, this event stood as a testament to the power of collaboration and the importance of equipping young people with the tools to become active participants in democracy.



The event emphasized the importance of voter participation,





# District 205

## MISSION STATEMENT:

Thornton Township High School District 205 endeavors to develop productive citizens who are enrolled, enlisted, or employed at the completion of high school.

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# *the* DREAM

*Continues*



**SOUTH SUBURBAN  
COLLEGE**



**THORNTON TOWNSHIP**  
HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 205

*REV. DR. MARTIN  
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**GUEST SPEAKER  
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