The Leaflet

Spring 2026



Mark Laduzinsky | John Mills



Morgan Murphy | Elmwood



Derek Snitker | EPHS



Lisa Marsicano | EPHS





Tyeda Lester | Elmwood

Pictured are the 2026 winners of the Illinois State Board of Education's "Those Who Excel" awards.

401 ELMWOOD PARK COMMUNITY UNIT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Five District Teachers Win ISBE Awards

ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Five district staff members were honored by the Illinois State Board of Education's "Those Who Excel" awards. Earning two different types of awards, we're proud to have amazing staff who consistently go the extra mile in their roles.

Award of Meritorious Service
Those who earn the Award of Meritorious Service are staff members who go above and beyond in service to their school community. They are experienced educators who take on leadership roles and their accomplishments uplift the learning culture in their school. They are known as great examples and are integral members of their schools and districts.

- Mark Laduzinsky - John Mills, Special Education Teacher
- Morgan Murphy - Elmwood, 3rd Grade Teacher
- Derek Snitker - EPHS, World Language/Music Curriculum Chair & Spanish Teacher

Award of Special Recognition
Staff members who earn the Award of Special Recognition are valued educators recognized by colleagues, students, families, and administrators for the skills and talents they bring to their schools.

- Lisa Marsicano - EPHS, Science Curriculum Chair & Teacher
- Tyeda Lester - Elmwood, 1st Grade Teacher

It's wonderful to see our incredible staff recognized for their hard work. "I'm honored to be thought of in a positive way," says teacher Derek Snitker. "It's validating—you put in a lot of work, and it makes you feel like what you're doing is important."

EPHS Virtual Enterprise Students Create Innovative Startup!



EPHS Virtual Enterprise students are seeing major success with their innovative startup, HydroRing! Guided by business teacher Rosaland Russell, the team developed a smart hydration ring designed to help athletes monitor and maintain optimal hydration.

Their work has earned multiple awards, including first-place wins in State Business Plan and Impact Marketing competitions, as well as a trip to the Youth Business Summit in New York City this April.

John Mills 5th Grader Earns Spelling Bee Champion Title



Student Adam Malone poses with his mother after winning spelling bee

Student Adam Malone was over the moon when he realized that he had just clinched the 2026 spelling bee competition! "At first I was in a state of shock, then I was pumped with so much energy I felt like I could run across the gym," he said. Winning on the word "abysmal," this contest was anything but abysmal for him!

Going through a rigorous practice schedule, Adam and the John Mills team were thoroughly prepared for the day. Even with a close call on the word "invective," Adam was able to sound it out and ultimately spell it correctly, giving him the confidence to go on and win the title.

Finishing as runners-up were Elm 7th grader Molly Shanahan, the defending champion, and John Mills 5th grader Ivy Oliaro. Congratulations to all 24 students who participated, each representing their schools with great effort and enthusiasm.

After this major feat, Adam went on to participate in the West40 Scripps Spelling Bee competition. The competitions that District 401 and West40 hold are part of the process of selecting contestants for the 2026 Scripps National Spelling Bee. We wish Adam the best of luck in all future contests!

Winter Olympics at Elmwood Elementary



Elmwood Elementary students got to participate in their own Winter Olympics this year, coinciding with the games in Italy! The kids had a blast moving, competing, and cheering on their countries!

Important Upcoming Events

- March 30: Enrollment Opens
- May 25: Memorial Day
- May 28: Elm Graduation
- May 29: EPHS Graduation
- May 29: Last Day of School

2026–2027 Enrollment Opens March 30th!

Don't forget to enroll for the upcoming school year!

Find more information here:

https://www.epcusd401.org/enroll

Elm Winter Sports Roundup

Congratulations to Elm Middle School's winter sports teams for a fantastic season full of Cougar pride! The varsity boys basketball team went undefeated in the regular season and earned a third-place finish in the Leyden-Norwood Athletic Conference playoffs, with the JV boys also finishing third in their tournament. Our Scholastic Bowl teams both had strong performances at the LNAC Invitational, and the girls basketball squads showed grit and growth throughout their season. The wrestling team continued to build its program, giving many Cougars the opportunity to shine through regular season and IESA postseason opportunities. Across all sports — including spirited performances from poms and cheer — Elm athletes represented Cougar pride with heart and hustle.


Boys JV Basketball


Boys Varsity Basketball


Cheer Team


Poms Dance Team


Girls JV Basketball


Girls Varsity Basketball


Scholastic Bowl


Wrestling

SCOTY Award Winners 2026

Congratulations to the West40 **Student Citizens of the Year**! The selected students are known as being positive role models, demonstrating acts of leadership and kindness. In April, these students will be celebrated at West40's annual ceremony!



Arianna Reyes-Arreola & Alexa Rojas



Lorenzo Selvaggio-Schneider & Serani Perez



Giovanni Perez & Abigail Ranallo


Meredith Brayton & Danny Dohoney

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Stories Around 401

We have the privilege of telling the many stories of our staff and students at District 401. Scan the QR code to view our website, latest news, all social channels, and more!

Source
Krista Kerber, Writer & Designer
Dave Porreca, Photographer & Contributor

District 401 Literacy Night



District 401 families came together this year for our Title I Literacy Night! With a fun food theme and special presentations by professional authors and illustrators, students had an amazing time exploring reading, writing, and drawing.

DECA Spike for a Cause



This year's Spike for a Cause event, organized by DECA students at EPHS, was a major success for the Alzheimer's Association. Competitive staff volleyball games helped raise $11,270, ranking in the Illinois top 10 for Alzheimer's fundraisers. DECA students will continue their impressive season with the chance to compete at an international event in Atlanta this April.

Artist of the Week



Congrats to Elmwood 3rd grader Nevaeh Perez, who was named Artsonia Artist of the Week! Her Nutcracker drawing won 480 votes, earning her a $50 gift card and $100 for Elmwood art supplies. Shoutout to her art teacher, Ms. Guenther, for helping students shine!

Dance Team Advances to State



For the first time ever, the EPHS competitive dance team qualified for state finals! Coached by Gina Gallo and captained by senior Bella Wernsing, the Tigers earned this milestone with their standout routine at the Class 1A Sectional. Congrats to the team on this historic achievement!

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