

THE ICE

Gym

New varieties of gym classes are among the different paths the school is taking under the University of Rochester's guidance

EAST TAKES TO

JUSTIN MURPHY @CITIZENMURPHY

To hear East High School gym teacher Mike Militello describe it one day last week, ice skating is as easy as walking — maybe easier. ♦ Shoulders forward. Feet shoulder width apart. Then: push and glide, push and glide. ♦ Around the bean-shaped ice rink at Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Park in downtown Rochester, however, evidence was building to the contrary. From every direction came yelps, thuds and groans. ♦ There were zero lutzes or axels. Salchows were out of the question. ♦

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See GYM, Page 14A “We’re trying to empower our kids to have a choice in what they learn, and with whom. We’re finding they’re enjoying it more, our participation rate is higher and the passing rate is almost 10 points higher than it was in 2014-15.”

EAST HIGH ATHLETIC DIRECTOR PATRICK IRVING Rachael White, Ashika Rai and Niyoyankuze Estera support each other at MLK Jr. Ice Rink during one of the new Choice PE Program classes offered at East High School. Participation in PE classes has increased because of the Choice program.

MAX SCHULTE/@MAXROCPHOTO/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

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EAST HIGH ATHLETIC DIRECTOR PATRICK IRVING

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Surely it would have been easier to stay at school and play basketball. But East High is putting a priority on gym class in the hope that exciting new units will make students more likely not just to get a passing grade, but also to get out in the community and pick up a new hobby in their personal lives. In the school’s first year

with the University of Rochester, students are not only ice skating but also practicing yoga, mountain-biking, in-line skating, bowling and playing pickleball. What is more, they're allowed to choose their own activities rather than having them assigned as they were before. "We're trying to empower our kids to have a choice in what they learn, and with whom," said East High Athletic Director Patrick Irving. "We're finding they're enjoying it more, our participation rate is higher and the passing rate is almost 10 points higher than it was in 2014-15." The added costs are minimal — the Rochester City School District already owned the mountain bikes, and facility rental fees come from the school's existing budget, Irving said. Transportation is an added logistical concern, but Militello said the return of longer block-schedule periods makes it possible. At East High and elsewhere, the district has made a priority lately of expanding extracurricular and non-core academic offerings for students. It is framed as both a matter of equity — ensuring city students have the same opportunities as their suburban counterparts — and a way to improve attendance and engagement.

If a student is passionate about one thing at school, the thinking goes, she will be more likely to stay committed to eventually obtaining a diploma.

"We're just trying to expose them to different activities," Militello said. "It's exciting that the (University of Rochester) has opened these doors to things I think were lacking in the district before."

Many of the new activities, including ice skating, were new to the students. They inched along, hands outspread, and shrieked as they tumbled. No one seemed to mind the cold or the bruises.

"It's just a little break from school, and it's fun," said Cloe Ramos, a 10th grader. "I think we should just get outside the box, and that's what this is."

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Niyoyankuze Estera and teacher Mike Militello help Binita Mangar up at MLK Jr. Ice Rink during one of the new Choice PE Program classes offered at East High School. Students may choose their own activities, rather than having them assigned.

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different activities. It's exciting that the (University of Rochester) has opened these doors to things I think were lacking in the district before.”

MIKE MILITELLO

EAST HIGH SCHOOL GYM TEACHER