

July 27, 2020

EMES Mission Statement

“The purpose of our school is to teach all children to become competent, caring citizens and life-long learners through a challenging and relevant curriculum.”



Dear EMES Families -

I hope you all enjoyed this beautiful summer weekend. Our family spent a lot of time outside swimming and kayaking, and on Saturday night we watched the fire works in Barre, which was a nice treat.

Thank you for filling out last Monday’s survey on the reopening of school. As a district, we had 1257 surveys returned, and EMES had 169 responses. Of those, 71% of our families said they prefer to send their child back to EMES full time, and 29% said they prefer a remote option for their children. We recognize that so many factors contributed to you determining your preference, and that your response represents your thinking in that moment in time, which can change between now and August. This data, however, was helpful to our district’s leadership team as we think about potential next steps. We recognize this truly is a no-win situation for anyone, and no matter what decisions we try to make, they impact everyone on so many different levels.

As of this morning, WCUUSD plans on reopening K-8 full time with a full remote learning option for those families who prefer that. At this time, we do not have plans for a hybrid learning option that you have likely read about in other districts, as our schools and classrooms can fit all of our students back full-time. I know that while a hybrid option may work better for some of our families, when we surveyed you in June, the majority of you said this option would be more challenging. Over the course of these next few weeks, we will work to figure out the details of both the in-person and remote learning options, as I know you will need these in order to continue to make decisions for your children.

In thinking about outdoor spaces for learning, EMES is so fortunate to have so many spaces available to us just outside our doors. We are hoping to take full advantage of these with outdoor classroom spaces for each of our 10 classrooms in addition to our playgrounds and fields. I have created another [brief survey](#) for you to complete, which will help us with designing these spaces and getting the equipment we need to teach your children outdoors. Please take a few moments to fill out [this survey](#) on our outdoor learning spaces.

In looking at the survey results from last week, you raised many great questions. I have provided answers/responses to many of these questions on the following pages of this newsletter, and I am hopeful they will be helpful to you.

I hope you and your children enjoy this last week in July and I look forward to sharing more updates with you next week.

Best,

Alicia

Alicia Lyford, Principal

2020-2021 EMES Family Newsletter

Frequently Wondered Questions (FWQ), Edition 1: In-Person Learning

- *First off, why is the district prioritizing in-person learning?*
 - We decided that we will be offering in-person learning for all elementary students based on guidance and recommendations from a number of medical organizations, including the American Pediatrics Association. We acknowledge that COVID-19 has potential implications for anyone but medical guidance suggests that the transmission rate between children does not warrant continued need for children to be away from schools. Further, we feel strongly that the best thing for children is for them to be around peers and are most likely to make academic progress through in-person learning. We know that school will feel different but we still think that we can make our classrooms and school safe, warm, caring places for learning to occur. *(The next FWQ will address remote learning.)*

- *What practices will be in place to ensure that the physical school is a safe place for my child(ren)?*
 - Before coming to school, either by riding the bus or being transported, families will need to ensure that children are safe to attend school and are free of a fever above 100.4 degrees, have no respiratory symptoms or other COVID-related symptoms, haven't been in contact with anyone with COVID, and will complete an assessment. We are working with a web-based application in order for families to complete this assessment at home before leaving for school. We will have more information soon about this application but know that it will help ensure healthy and safe travel and days at school. We will have additional screening measures at school to ensure that students are fever and symptom free before entering the building.
 - School nurses across WCUUSD are developing procedures to care for the medical needs of students. One requirement from the reopening guidance is that schools must identify an isolation space so that if a student has COVID symptoms they can be cared for apart from the nurse's office for other treatment of bumps, scrapes, and other kid-related needs. EMES and all schools will have an isolation room for the start of the school year.
 - One of the most important things is that children and staff who are not feeling well will need to stay home. Though we will miss our students when they are not with us, it is essential that students who are sick do not come to school with respiratory symptoms or a fever. Students that have seasonal allergies will want to connect with our school nurse to help make decisions about how to keep our school safe and healthy.
 - Our district facilities team is developing procedures to disinfect high-traffic surfaces to ensure that the physical building is safe, clean, and well maintained.
 - All students and staff will wear masks or face coverings and will practice frequent hand washing or use hand sanitizer.

- *What will it look like if my child rides the bus to school?*
 - While we are hopeful that families who are able to transport their child to/from school will do so in a private vehicle or will carpool to reduce the number of students riding on buses. Though imperfect, a carpool still poses a lower risk of exposure than on a bus with children from 20+ different homes.
 - First Student is our transportation provider for WCUUSD schools. First Student (a company across North America) has researched products for deep disinfection and protection of the bus and will also have daily disinfecting of high-touch surfaces.
 - Students will continue to have assigned seats on the bus. We are still making decisions about how students will be grouped - there are two major ideas. Though there will be some adjustments needed on an individual basis, we will assign seats by classroom/grade, so that

students will be near others in the same classroom or “pod” and there is not additional, unnecessary cross exposure. Depending on how many students are riding each bus, we may also have students from the same household sit together.

- Students will be required to wear masks while riding the bus. Bus drivers remain focused on safely driving the bus and will work with school staff to ensure that students understand why masks are required. Health and safety are paramount and students being able to ride the bus depends on wearing their masks and maintaining a safe environment for other riders.
- *What will it look like when arriving at school?*
 - When arriving at school, students who have completed the home screening will be directed to their classrooms. *(The application that we are working with will give us a report so we know who has been screened, we will not be relying on the memory of 3-11 year olds!)*
 - Students who have placed an order for breakfast (we will order ahead for the next day) will take a “grab and go” breakfast to their classroom.
 - This part is hard to write: In order to minimize the risk of transmission, family members will not be allowed to enter the building. We will make exceptions in preschool and kindergarten at the start of the year but families will be notified separately about what that will look like. We so value our families and love seeing you in the hallways!! In order to keep exposure at a minimum, we have to ensure that our students and staff are safe and healthy and this is one practice that we will begin the year with.
- *What will the day look like in my child’s classroom?*
 - To the extent possible, classrooms will function as a “pod” throughout their day and week. This means that there will be very minimal travel or switching of classrooms throughout the day. A homeroom class or “pod” will remain intact and will have reduced interactions and exposure to other classrooms/pods so that contact tracing remains more manageable if necessary.
 - The physical setup of the room will look different than what we would expect in a classroom in 2020. While we typically have favored opportunities for partner and group work, COVID-19 has changed the “landscape” and also the physical setup of our classrooms. Based on the current guidance/recommendations of keeping each person 6 feet apart, our classrooms will reflect this where and when possible. At EMES, we are able to maintain six feet (or nearly six feet) of distance in classrooms, between seats. Students will be sitting at assigned desks or tables and all desks/tables are required to face one direction.
 - Though things like Morning Meeting and instructional and practice learning times will look different, our teachers and staff are inherently caring community builders who will do all that they can to ensure that students feel safe, cared for, and comfortable. We won’t be sitting together in a circle on the rug, but we *will* be together as a classroom community and we will grow and strengthen our connections each day.
 - As with every other part of our day together, students will wear masks and will have frequent opportunities for hand washing or using hand sanitizer.
- *What will Allied Arts (Music, Art, PE, Library, Guidance) look like?*
 - Student pods will not travel to typical allied arts spaces but will stay in classrooms (or go outside when the lesson and weather permit) for allied arts lessons.
 - In an attempt to limit the number of adults that students interact with, we are developing a schedule that will limit the number of different allied arts students have at a time. I will share the allied arts schedule with you next week.

- *How will lunch and recess occur?*
 - Due to the lack of individual spaces and inability to maintain social distancing in the cafeteria, lunch will take place in the classroom or in their outdoor classroom space.
 - Note that some classrooms will have specific dietary restrictions to ensure a safe place for all students. Our nurse or the classroom teacher will alert you if your child is in a classroom. Do keep in mind that if there is an allergy in a classroom that your child would be unable to bring a lunch or snack containing the product. We appreciate your consideration and cooperation in advance as we plan for safe spaces for all of our students.
 - Recess will occur outdoors (except when weather or ice doesn't allow it!) and each classroom will have a designated area as not to cross contacts. High touch surfaces will be disinfected and students will need to wash or sanitize hands before and after recess. I will share more detailed recess plans with you next week.
 - Each classroom will have a designated recess bag for balls and toys that they will use for recess time and we are looking into getting a variety of lawn games for students to play.

- *This sounds like a lot of time in the classroom! How are we going to give kids a break?*
 - Good point! We will be identifying outdoor spaces for each classroom. It will be important for each classroom to have a designated area to get some fresh air, take a "mask break" when social distancing allows, and either do some *learning outdoors* and/or some *outdoor learning*. Please take a few moments to complete our Outdoor Classroom Survey!

I know that there are many, many more questions and wonderings that you have right now. These were some of the important ones that I wanted you to know in order to think about how you and your child(ren) will talk about and plan for a safe return to school. I've written this before but I'll remind you again, it is so important that between now and the time that we return to school that students (and staff!) become accustomed to wearing masks while at school and on the bus. Governor Scott has declared a mask mandate that goes into effect on August 1st and in order to maintain safe and healthy operation of our schools that we can partner together to keep our schools open.

The next issue of this Frequently Wondered Questions ([*FWQ, Edition 2*](#)) will address remote learning. We are hopeful and expect that most of our students will be learning in-person at EMES and WCUUSD schools when we reopen but we recognize that in-person instruction is not a viable option for all families. We are working on online platforms and securing district-wide instructors for remote learning and we look forward to sharing updates soon.