

Letter from the Grade Level Representatives

Dear ECS Families and Faculty,

We wanted to let you know about a collaborative initiative amongst the school administration and Parent Community of ECS - the Grade Representatives Committee. This committee is comprised of school principals and volunteer representatives from each grade level.

The purpose of the Grade Reps program is to *collect trending concerns and feedback from each grade to share with the administration with an eye toward problem solving when needed*. We welcome your questions and concerns and look forward to addressing them during these monthly meetings. Feedback / notes will be shared through the room parents and can also be found online: <http://ecspco.org/volunteer/grade-representatives/>.

Notes from Wednesday, September 6, 2017

Ashley, Mandy, Michelle Landau, Marissa Maguire (School Psych and working on Principal Intern), Stacy Parenti, Marla Ferrency, Toby McHenry, Maria Ziebert, Carolyn
Previous Month's Notes: [May 5, 2017](#)

Celebrations:

- **Great start to the school year!**
 - Upper School has been going outside, dissecting flowers, saving baby birds and sharing in the eclipse
 - Lower School implemented a Relaxation Station in every classroom for kids to calm down, relax; We also set into motion the YET initiative (when a child says "I can't," we turn the conversation to "You Can't YET..." as a way to build growth mindset)
 - Home Office: ECS added a full-time human resources person for our faculty, and officially launched our new Athletic Department with Athletic Director, Aaron Coleman
 - Equity and Diversity Committee: ECS is committed to moving to action around equity and diversity in our schools and in our greater organization. Right now,
 - Guidance Counselors having lunch with new kids -- great response from new parents!
 - Move Up for 4th Graders in the Upper School was a great success

Asks from our Administration to the Parent Community:

- **Bus idling patrol team.** Are you a parent that cares passionately about our air quality? That believes in the power of small changes makes a difference? We are looking for a set of volunteers to patrol the bus pick up spaces once a week (or

more) and celebrate or remind bus drivers that are following the law not to idle.
More information? Contact jon.mccann@ecspgh.org

Notes:

Q. What was the response of our ability to recruit and retain a more diverse staff?

What is the status of diversity and equity efforts of the school?

- A. ECS is working on building a 21st century workforce, and increased our efforts to create a space that is reflective of the diversity of our community. ECS was able to accomplish additional recruitment through the adoption of human resources software and targeted recruiting efforts. Additionally, ECS has a vibrant and active group of teachers and administrators that are working to embed intentional professional development throughout the school year.

ACTION ITEM: A representative from the Diversity and Equity Team should attend and report out the actions happening at the building level

Q. Parents raised concerns about the starting time of the school year. Can you talk about this more.

- A. A lot of thought goes into the calendar creation each year. We take feedback, look at what we learned from the previous year, and then also look at the Pittsburgh Public School. We wanted to start on a Thursday/Friday to ensure that the early week helps kids that are transitioning back. We need to have students in session for 192 days, and staff at 205. Allowing folks the latitude to experience a trip at the beginning of the year is a great opportunity for students.

Q. Can you talk about the 2nd/3rd grade lunch seating?

- A. Second and Third sit with their classrooms. When students are new, they do not have someone to sit with at first. The homebase is still developing classroom communities, and building the relationships within their rooms.

Q. What about 4th grade lunch? Will students be assigned seating?

- A. The space is a lot larger in the cafe! And students are getting used to it. We are on a good track to building great norms and continuing open seating! If you have a concern about seating, please let us know.

Q. How are the classes distributed in 4th grade? Is there thinking behind keeping kids together or splitting them up?

- A. It is a process that is intentional, and includes team members from 3rd and 4th grade teachers and administrators. We review personalities of kids and teachers, and we try our best to make it a positive arrangement. *Supporting question: If a parent has a concern about the placement, who should they contact?* The homebase is the first line of defense (is it a seating issue? Would the child benefit

from a connection or a lunch bunch?). If there's something more serious or concerning, reach out to the principals. It is difficult to make shifts or transitions at the beginning of the year without disrupting all classrooms. Mandy and Ashley recommend connecting with principals at the end of the school year if there are particular things you would like them to note in choosing a placement for the following year. Don't worry about connecting with a home base teacher! This is what they want to know and what they do -- they want to hear from you!

Q. Can you give us some additional information about the Lower School Beautification Project?

- A. The zoning process is complete. We are now moving into the permitting phase. The artifacts needed for this process will be finalized in the next month. This permitting phase will then finalize over 40 days and the community build will happen in the spring.

Q. Parents felt there was mixed messages about the coverage of the solar eclipse in classrooms. Can you talk about this?

- A. We wanted to ensure that everyone was safe. We were excited -- and then also realized that we were not prepared to provide the outside experience for all students in a safe way. We wanted to make sure that all students had an experience of some kind that was related to this solar. In the future, we should make sure that the communication is super clear what the expectation is for students. At minimum, everyone was talking about it.

Q. Can you elaborate on ECS' gifted program? Many parents have commented that ECS does not meet the needs of gifted students and is more inclined to spend the time providing resources to kids who are working to improve and reach benchmarks. Can you explain how you handle differentiation and enrichment? Is this a priority for ECS?

- A. All students are screened for the gifted at grade 3. ECS is committed to helping all students making academic gains, including those with high cognitive abilities. We recognize the importance of identifying those students, which is why *all* students are screened for the gifted program in third grade. We meet the needs of high ability students through curriculum differentiation. The seeds of differentiation are planted during the unit design process so that enrichment is embedded seamlessly into the unit and **not added on as an afterthought**. ME/PRIME Time provides another opportunity for students to collaborate with cognitive peers on more advanced, abstract projects.

Q. Can you talk about the movement away from Schoology?

- A. ECS is moving away from Schoology and towards E-School+, which will provide a more clear and concise portal to view information for parents/guardians, students,

and teachers. It holds all of our contact information, grades, benchmarks and transcripts. Neither Schoology nor Google Classroom are ECS directed initiatives and any classroom use is left to the discretion of teachers to organize classroom content. The goal is to get all parents transitioned from other systems and onto ES+ Home Access Center by the 2018-2019 school year.

Q. If my kid isn't turning things in, how will I know? Will teachers be providing me information if my kid isn't performing/homework isn't turned in/test is failed?

- A.** We added Advisory Time into our middle school schedule. An assigned teacher and the student will review twice a week to ensure that students are accountable to the work, that they are building connection between organization and self. If you haven't heard from the advisory teacher, and your child is in 6-8th grade, please reach out to your child's homebase teacher and let them know.

ACTION ITEM: What is the "benchmark moment" that teachers can reach out the parent/guardian (BEFORE THE PROGRESS REPORT) to let them know if assignments aren't being turned in, performance on tests is less than stellar, etc. Mandy will provide this information to teachers to determine a tactical solution.