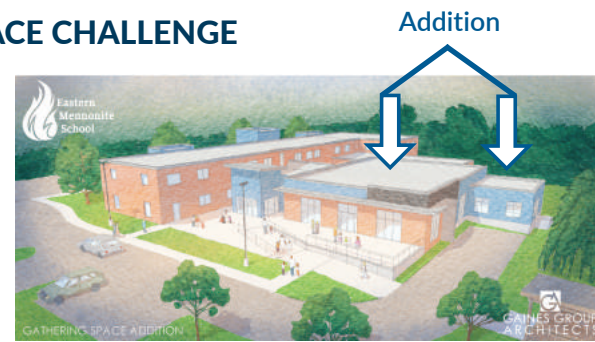


Advancing EMS...

\$1M GATHERING SPACE CHALLENGE

A generous alumni couple has offered a \$1 million challenge gift toward the construction of the **Gathering Space**. This addition to the EMES renovated building (completed in Dec. 2019) will provide a “family room” type of space for students, teachers, and families to gather for stories of faith, and to eat, learn, and play together. Watch for updates in the coming months as the project gains momentum. Contact Paul Leaman, leamanp@easternmennonite.org, if you'd like to get involved.



GREAT COMMUNITY GIVE 2023

Watch for invitations this spring to join the Harrisonburg-Rockingham **Great Community Give** on April 19 and support EMS! Last year, donors contributed nearly \$28,000 to help upgrade the auditorium stage. This year, funds raised through the Give will go toward the new Gathering Space \$1M challenge.



HOMECOMING – OCT. 20 & 21, 2023

Mark your calendars! Activities for all with reunions for classes ending in 3 and 8.

Special event: **Alumni volleyball match**, Sat., Oct. 21 at 2 p.m. Even vs. odd years. Varsity players from all eras are welcome!

See the full schedule: easternmennonite.org/homecoming



We celebrated the contributions of Ruth Wenger '67 during Homecoming 2022. Ruth started the EMHS girls volleyball program 45 years earlier, in 1977.

NOMINATE A CLASSMATE to celebrate during homecoming!

Preference for alumni from grad years ending in 3 and 8.
Complete the form at easternmennonite.org/alumni

Fore the Flames Golf Tournament April 28, 2023

Line up your foursome now and plan to golf at Heritage Oaks on Friday, April 28! Proceeds from this annual day of connection support student financial aid, EMS athletics, and alumni connections. Sponsorship opportunities, registration, and schedule easternmennonite.org/golf



EMS golf “elder statesmen,” all over age 90. L-R Ken Zehr, Ed Collins, Sam Weaver, Irv Weaver (who hit a hole in one in 2021!).

Today is written by Andrea Wenger, director of advancement, and designed by Lindsey Kolb. Editorial support from Trisha Blosser, development officer, and Paul Leaman, head of school. Photos by Andrea Wenger unless otherwise noted.

easternmennonite.org/today

In admissions processes, Eastern Mennonite School does not discriminate on the basis of any race, color, handicap, national or ethnic origin, or religion, and admits students to all rights, privileges, programs and activities generally accorded or made available to students at the school.

The following person has been designated to handle inquiries regarding the school's non-discrimination policies, including its Title IX policy: Andrea Wenger, director of advancement, 540-236-6026. For assistance related to Title IX or other civil rights laws, please contact OCR at OCR@ed.gov or 800-421-3481, TDD 800-877-8339.



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TODAY

Volume 40, No. 2
Winter 2023



Taking Risks

Band teacher Nick Gardner told students he'd shave off half his beard if at least nine students had the courage to audition for district band. They came through, and Mr. Gardner was happy to comply with the outcome.

EMS is a place where teachers encourage students to move out of their comfort zone, take risks, and even, to make mistakes. That vulnerability helps students to grow in confidence and develop empathy.

Applications for grades 6-12 are still welcome for the 2023-24 school year. Visit Days are **Monday, Feb. 24** and **Monday, April 3**. Parents/guardians will tour and learn about financial aid, scholarships, academic philosophy, and school culture. Prospective students will shadow a student with similar interests until 12 noon. Register at easternmennonite.org/visit



Justin King, high school principal, greets students by name each morning, one way to foster a culture of belonging. Photo by Andrew Gascho

Anabaptist Education, Now More Than Ever

By Justin King, M.Ed. in Educational Leadership
High School Principal

I believe there's never been a more difficult time to be a teen. Societal polarization. A technological revolution. Covid. Anxiety and depression in record numbers. New addictive substances in slick packaging targeting teens.

It's a high school experience so different from generations past, that the adults in teens' lives cannot fully relate.

For these reasons, I believe **there's never been a more important time for an Anabaptist education.**

In our relatively small school, we are able to celebrate each student's inherent worth, and teach them about lives of purpose and meaning (Jeremiah 29:11). We use restorative practices and challenge students to realize that life is not just about “me,” but about serving others.

Students will tell you that one of my favorite phrases is: “**I am somebody.**” I want students to remember “I am somebody” when they think, “Somebody should do something about that.”

(continued on page 4)

THANK YOU! Student-led Success

You responded to students' Christmas Fund Drive invitations to support EMS students, teachers, and staff! As of January 20, 415 generous donors gave 470 gifts totaling \$162,495.

Your support encourages us. Thank you!

Students practice important communication skills with the drive. More than 40 practiced verbal skills by asking teachers, thanks to a donor who earmarked 100 \$10 gifts so teachers could say “yes!” when students saw them wearing an “Ask Me!” fund drive sticker.

Thank you to those who sent notes to students, and constructive feedback to planners. We welcome your input as we continually tweak the program. Send to advancement@easternmennonite.org

FOLLOW US:



EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

FAITH COMMUNITY

THE ARTS

easternmennonite.org

Q & A WITH EMS COUNSELORS

Each of our 380+ students are known by at least one EMS professional counselor, as well as their principal, and teachers. Counselors have open doors and are visible throughout the day.



Jodi Hertzler
College and Career Counselor
BA in English from Eastern Mennonite University. Certificate in College Counseling, UCLA Extension, 2021. Restorative Justice in Education coursework.



Debbie Katz
High School Counselor
BA in Human Development and Sociology from California State Univ.; MSW with clinical concentration from Loma Linda University, 2000. Restorative Justice in Education coursework.



Gini Trotter
Elementary and Middle School Counselor
BS from Eastern Mennonite University; M.Ed and Ed.S. School Counseling from James Madison University. Restorative Justice in Education coursework.

Q: What is the primary way you interact with students?



Jodi: I meet with each class group at least once a year to talk about the college application process, and schedule individual meetings with each junior and senior (seniors with a parent/guardian). I host a college application workshop before school each fall for seniors. Students know they can drop by my office anytime and often pop in to ask a quick question or schedule a longer meeting to work on an essay or application. I also respond to many emailed questions and requests for essay feedback from seniors.



Debbie: Face-to-face conversation. Mostly I meet with students individually or with a group in my office. Sometimes we go outside and sit or take a walk. I've met with students in the gym and talked while shooting hoops.

With parent permission, I've met with students at a coffee or bagel shop since they didn't feel comfortable meeting on campus. And some prefer to talk through email exchanges.



Gini: My student interactions vary across the age span. Play is an important part of a student's communication process in younger years. This takes many forms (individually or in small groups) with games, art, stories, puppets, sand tray, gardening, etc. As students approach middle school, interactions lean more toward processing through talk and sometimes include art or movement.

Q: What do you see our students struggling with?



Jodi: Many students feel pressured to make decisions they aren't ready for, or to attend colleges that have a certain level

of perceived prestige, even if those colleges might not be the best fit for them. It's even more difficult for students who don't want to attend college, but feel that option is looked down on. The college admissions landscape is much more fraught now than it was when I was a student, and it's easy for students to think they have to do everything – to have perfect grades in highly demanding classes while participating in a variety of extracurricular activities and leadership positions... and then to complete long, detailed college applications with multiple essays. I do my best to encourage a healthy balance and help them discern the path that is the right fit for them, but it's still quite stressful.



Debbie: Some students struggle academically. I enjoy partnering with them, trying different ways to support, encourage, and explore the root of the issues for why a certain class or school in general may be difficult. Anxiety,

depression, friendships, dating and breakups are other areas where some students struggle. Some are wrestling with their identity and trying to figure out their relevance in this world. Feeling conflicted about their future prospects and how to communicate that stress to parents/guardians is common, as well as fearing failure or not meeting expectations (their own and family). I also have the privilege of being invited into faith discussions and prayer times with students.



Gini: The worry brain is one of the most common challenges that I see our students face, showing itself in different ways. In addition, students are often searching for ways to resolve conflicts, build healthy relationships, or prepare for the future. I'm here to support students with whatever unique social, emotional, and academic needs they present.



Q: What makes you proud of our students?
Jodi: I just love our students. As a whole, they display such a remarkable good will

toward one another, and for the most part they are able to appreciate the unique qualities each individual possesses. Because of this, students generally feel free to express themselves genuinely. Even our most academically ambitious students tend to be collaborative rather than competitive. I also think that our students are quite good at advocating for themselves and building positive relationships with their teachers and staff members.



Debbie: There are so many ways that I can express how proud I am of our students. From their hard work in the classroom, but also outside school time through sports, theater arts, robotics, Model UN, etc, I am proud of our students' ability to verbalize their struggles and seek out solutions. Our students support each other and pay attention to when their friends are going through a difficult time. Many times students have encouraged friends to find me as a support. Our students take disclosures of self-harm and thoughts of suicide seriously and readily let me know of those concerns.



Gini: I appreciate the thoughtful way students relate to one another in ways that can both challenge and show dignity and respect for each other. EMS students put feet to their faith as they look for ways to meet the needs they see and show leadership in the process of making things right in our world.

Q: What can EMS uniquely offer students?



Jodi: I have the privilege of reading the letters of recommendation our teachers write; those letters make it clear that each student here has at least one close relationship with an adult in the building. Our students are known and they are valued for their unique gifts. EMS offers the opportunity for students to explore a huge variety of activities and to take leadership roles in those areas. The level of trust and opportunity afforded to them is impressive. And finally, just the fact that EMS has invested in a half-time college counseling position is rare.

Performing Arts

Performing music, leading worship, and staging a theater production all support emotional and social well being for both participants and audience members.

Theater performances in the fall included the K-5 annual dessert theater and the high school staging of *Our Town*. EMHS students also staged the musical *Godspell* Feb. 10-12 with a pit orchestra. Middle school students will perform *A Midsummer Night's Dream* May 5 and 6.

Band, Orchestra and the choirs perform in a concert at the end of each trimester. Tour and Chamber Choirs lead worship in area churches and on a week-long trip in the spring. They also perform in community settings, such as a Rotary Club meeting. Find their schedule at easternmennonite.org/touring-choir

Visual Arts

The "Belonging Mandala" project is an example of how art class can support emotional and social well being. The middle school project begins with students creating a



Esther Kniss '49 Augsburg, second from left, started the school's art program in 1971. Last fall, her painting, *Shekinah*, was moved into the auditorium from the entrance, where it had hung since the arts addition was dedicated in 2005. She initially painted it for the former Chapel at the request of Principal Samuel Weaver. Pictured after a Chapel celebration with Esther are Gloria Diener (former English teacher), Barbara Gautcher (art teacher for 32 years), and Malea Gascho (current 6-12 art teacher). See the Chapel video, and learn more about Esther's career at easternmennonite.org/art-program

piece that represents themselves. Next, trios of students work on a piece that depicts things they have in common and what is different. Finally, the projects are combined into one circular piece representing the group. Gini Trotter, counselor, then leads a discussion about what it means to belong.

As people created in the image of God, students explore and express their reactions to the world, their family, and the faith they are developing through art classes in grades K-12. Creating

art stimulates lateral thinking and develops persistence, reinforces a healthy self-concept, and opens the door to future creative pursuits.

Elementary classes create a collaborative work of art each year that is raffled off to parents and made into notecards. All K-8 students are exposed to foundations in art and various mediums. High school students choose electives including digital photography, digital drawing, stained glass, printing, ceramics, advanced water color, and more.

Athletics: Sacred Space

By Andrew Gascho, Athletic Director and Girls Varsity Soccer Coach

I believe participation in sports at EMS provides a sacred space for students to explore their gifts and step outside their comfort zone.

Our student-athletes make lifelong friendships, create impactful memories, and learn life skills within a caring team environment. With the support and mentoring of coaches, they commit to being part of something greater than themselves and learn to support others as they strive to do their personal best.

Participating in a sport provides an invaluable mental break from the classroom, giving athletes a chance each day to disconnect from the world and have fun with some of their closest friends.

More broadly, I see EMS athletics providing a consistent way for our students, faculty, staff, families and community members to come together, often multiple times a week. Fans deepen friendships when they gather and celebrate success, and support through disappointments.

These moments are where lives are transformed through sport.



easternmennonite.org/athletics
twitter.com/EmsFlames



Photo by Bethany Gibbs



Photo by Joaquin Sosa



ANABAPTIST EDUCATION (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

More importantly, I want them to remember "I am somebody" if they fall into feelings of worthlessness.

I make it a point to greet each high school student by name as they come into school each day. It's

one way I help to foster a culture of belonging and remind each student that they are "somebody."

I am grateful to be part of the work at EMS to feed "the good" that is in each of our students. I wish every parent, community member, and alumnus could

follow me throughout a day and feel the hope I have, despite the complexities these students face.

And maybe you would come away from that experience saying, like I do, "Somebody should tell society about the hope that is found in our younger generation."