

TODAY



BETTER TEACHING BEGINS WITH CARING

↑ Ms. Hertzler believes in cultivating meaningful relationships, providing personalized support, and creating a nurturing community. She exemplifies how impactful teaching begins with caring.



At EMS, genuine care for students' well-being and growth is the bedrock for education. This philosophy is embodied by Jodi Nisly '91 Hertzler, English teacher, senior class sponsor, and college counselor since 2014. Hertzler's approach to teaching is deeply rooted in her own experiences as an EMS student, where the connections she made with her teachers left a lasting impact.

Hertzler graduated from EMS 30 years ago, and her journey has come full circle as she now guides students through their academic and personal growth. Reflecting on her own time as a student, she recalls, "What I remember most about my experience is the connections I had with my teachers. They were mentors who shaped my journey, and I strive to be that for my students."

At EMS, Hertzler's role as a college counselor is unique. Unlike in many

schools, she has the opportunity to form deep, personalized relationships with students, providing them with tailored guidance through the college admission process or whatever their next steps may include. Hertzler notes, "Because of our small size, I can tailor each student's experience to what they need most, whether it's independent check-ins or more hands-on support."

"Our life journeys take unpredictable turns and unique routes. We don't need to map out the entire path; we just need to focus on the next step and guide them forward, whether it's a gap year, a job, or a prestigious college. Most of our students get into the college of their choice and 98% go to college. More importantly, whatever they choose, they are confident to succeed there."

Hertzler's dedication to her students is evident in the memorable moments she shares. Once, a student, who had been waitlisted by his dream school,

Jodi Hertzler significantly impacted my life. As my teacher, poetry club leader, college counselor, and senior class advisor, she offered a safe space and thoughtful feedback. Her support was crucial in my college journey.

Recent EMS alumnus

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EMS STEPPING STONES

Faith, The Arts, and Experiential Learning become the bedrock for future success, academic achievement and community engagement

↑ David Berry, parent and board member accepts the senior class gift for EMS from Willem Kishbaugh '26.

5th

GRADE

TRANSITION WITH CONFIDENCE

"EMES changed my life. At my old school I was distracted and could not focus. When I came to EMS everything changed. I met my best friend, I got better at math, writing, and everything else—I even did a play! I am so thankful."

5th grade graduate, Rosalie

Our 5th grade celebration provides an opportunity for students to deliver speeches in front of their peers, younger students, families, and teachers.

As they transition from elementary school to the next middle school stage in their educational journey, they know that their voices will be heard. They do not need to do anything extraordinary to be valued; they are appreciated simply for who they are. The 5th grade

speeches are a perfect illustration of this principle. Every student has the chance to speak at the podium, creating a mini senior presentation experience (a capstone for the class Kingdom Living). As Maria Archer, EMES principal, reflects, "You verbalize what you value." Here's what these 5th grade speeches contribute to the community:

- They help everyone recognize how they connect with the community.
- Teachers see the impact of their investment and relationships with each student.
- Younger students think, "I want to feel like that; I'm sure I will."
- Parents witness their child's growth and take pride in their achievements.

↑ 5th Grade Teacher Merridy Gnagey listens to a student share.





12th
GRADE

READY FOR WHAT'S NEXT

"During my internship, I gained valuable skills—patience, classroom management, self-confidence, and flexibility."

12th grade graduate, Samara

A hands-on high school internship provides challenging and enriching opportunities that complement other EMHS distinctives like the capstone Senior Presentation project and E-Term (Experiential Learning Week). The blend of academic rigor and practical experiences, guided by dedicated mentors, helps students identify interests and make informed future choices. This liberal arts high school experience allows exploration of a diverse range of disciplines, from sciences to humanities. The product? An intentional, informed, and prepared senior student.

One senior who interned at a local engineering firm shared his experience: "During my internship, I was able to engage in daily operations, collaborate with professionals, and develop essential workplace skills related to mechanical engineering. This exposure offered me a glimpse into both the

challenges and rewards of a career in this field."

Another student interned at EMES (where she attended), working with both 2nd and 3rd graders. Inspired by her teacher mentors, she clarified her aspiration to teach. She discovered a passion for education and is eager to become a 2nd-grade teacher. She hopes to come back and work at EMES some day.

"During my internship, I gained valuable skills—patience, classroom management, self-confidence, and flexibility."

Mr. King, EMHS principal, stated, "I can confidently say that whatever lies ahead for these students, they will be well-prepared to thrive. Congratulations to the class of 2026!"



8th
GRADE

BRINGING NEW IDEAS

"We learned that when things get messy, it doesn't mean failure; it means growth. We are ready for what is next!"

8th grade graduate, Karcyn

The 8th grade celebration marks a significant transition for students as they prepare to enter high school. It's not just about completing this phase of education; it's about recognizing the unique qualities and experiences that each student brings to their future endeavors. Teachers give specific reflections for every student sharing a personal insight for them to hold on to. In these three years they have mastered research projects and participated in elaborate plays—this class of students has shown remarkable growth and teamwork. They are learning independence and developing their own identities in this shared community.

Ms. Gascho, EMMS principal, has journeyed with this class for three years as principal, and one year as their

teacher in 5th grade. Her dedication and support have been instrumental in guiding these students through their middle school years, nurturing them with dignity and care.

Leah King reflects on their journey, emphasizing the close bonds formed through shared experiences, such as E-term activities. She reminds her peers, "Always do the right thing, even when the right thing is the hard thing."

The 8th grade class of 2026 is prepared for the challenges and opportunities that high school will bring. Here's to their continued success and achievements!



↑ Erika Gascho congratulates student.

CONGRATULATIONS

CLASS OF 2026



ADVANCEMENT

The stories of student growth and alumni success in these pages are a direct result of your generosity and partnership. We are deeply grateful for your continued support.

SUPPORTING THE EMS EXPERIENCE

This year, Christmas Fund Drive and Great Community Give highlighted the generosity of our alumni, parents, grandparents, and friends who make EMS strong. Your generous spirit sustains the experiences of an EMS education—from Discovery trips and E-terms to arts, athletics, and personalized college counseling.

As one recent graduate reflected in a video interview, “I don’t know where else you’ll see a principal get you an internship.” Stories like these remind us that your gifts do more than support programs; they foster the relationships and experiences that shape students long after graduation.

LOOKING AHEAD

As we approach the close of the fiscal year, we are grateful for the strong support we have received. We are still working toward fully meeting our annual fundraising goals. Gifts made before June 30 continue to make a meaningful difference in sustaining financial aid and the full EMS experience.

Thank you to everyone who helps us build a learning community where students are known, supported, and encouraged.

With gratitude,

TRISHA MAUST '95 BLOSSER
Director of Advancement



↑ Students writing supporters to invite gifts for Christmas Fund Drive / Photo by TDC

↓ CONTINUED

ran into her classroom wearing a University of Virginia sweatshirt to celebrate his acceptance with a big hug. “That was really special,” she recalls with a smile.

Hertzler emphasizes the importance of community and mentorship at EMS. “Our teachers aren’t just instructors; they’re mentors,” she explains. “The connection between students and their teachers is vital. We know our students well enough to recommend opportunities that suit them and to encourage them to explore new interests.” She stresses the importance of finding the right fit for each student rather than focusing solely on prestigious school names.

This environment allows students to thrive in various fields, from STEM to the arts, supported by teachers who genuinely care

“Our teachers aren’t just instructors; they’re mentors”

about their success. Hertzler also highlights the comprehensive support she provides to students and their families, starting as early as ninth grade. “I meet with students individually, help them explore career options, and guide them through every step of the college application process,” she says.

Hertzler’s commitment to her students extends beyond academic advising. She values the personal growth of each student, ensuring they feel known, cared for, and empowered to make choices that align with their goals and passions. “My wish for all of our students is to feel that they belong, that they are cared for as individuals, and that we want the best for them.”

JOIN US!

WEDNESDAY, JULY 29, 5-6 PM

SUMMER DONOR APPRECIATION AND REVEAL OF DONOR RECOGNITION WALL IN GATHERING SPACE

EMS donors are welcome to join us for refreshing tea and summer treats in the Gathering Space. We will also be celebrating donors from the *Let the Children Come* and *We Gather* Elementary campaigns.



RSVP HERE ↑

ADMISSIONS

Families continue to discover EMS across all divisions, drawn by the community, academic challenge, and sense of belonging. Our elementary program remains full, and we continue to see interest in our middle and high school. Word of mouth remains the most meaningful way new families discover our community, and we are deeply grateful to those who invite friends and family into our school.

WELCOME TO TRAVIS NYCE '12!

Travis joins EMS as Admissions Counselor, bringing experience as a teacher, EMU admissions counselor, and Athletic Director at a Richmond private school.



Today is written by Abigail Cook, communication specialist, and designed by At Ease Design. All photos by EMS staff unless otherwise noted. Editorial support from Trisha Blosser, director of advancement, and Paul Leaman, head of school.

SEND FEEDBACK TO
today@easternmennonite.org

FIND PAST ISSUES AT
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: Debbie Katz, high school counselor, 540-236-6022. 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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READY TO START YOUR EMS JOURNEY?

Join us this fall for our open houses and family visit days →



TODAY



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Helps us build a learning community where students are known, supported, and encouraged.

easternmennonite.org

VIEW UPCOMING EVENTS FOR THE 2026-27 SCHOOL YEAR AT easternmennonite.org/calendar

COME TO CONNECT!

Homecoming 2026 ←

OCTOBER 16 & 17

Open to all! Strengthen life-long connections that gain value with each passing year.

- Friday picnic supper
- Reunions for classes ending '1 and '6
- Homecoming breakfast with Alumni story celebrations
- Concerts, volleyball, and soccer
- Tours of the buildings
- And more!



HONORING 60 YEARS OF SERVICE

**LARRY MARTIN (MS),
PATSY SEITZ (HS),
SUSAN STOLTZFUS (ES)**

Their carefully cultivated stepping stones are now solid EMS bedrock. Teaching in three divisions—elementary, middle, and high—we are immensely grateful for their collective service to EMS over the past 60 years. We are thankful for the strong foundation they have provided, which allows us to continue our growth.

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