# Welcome to ECS!

ecs

We grow citizens.

Environmental Charter School Overview
Intermediate School (3–5)

Updated October 2025

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# What makes ECS different?

The mission of ECS is to educate each student to high academic standards using innovative curricula that will foster knowledge, love of, and respect for the environment and preserve it for future generations.

Simply stated, **We grow citizens.**

Our vision is that every ECS graduate will be an actively engaged citizen driving thoughtful change in the world around them. Students master core academic content, while learning how to think critically, collaborate, communicate effectively, problem-solve and develop successful habits of mind.

# How We Do It.

## With holistic teaching methods rooted in real-world problems:

- **Multidisciplinary integration.** The problems classes grapple with are addressed across multiple disciplines to help students develop a holistic perspective and approach to problem-solving.
- **"Out-the-door" education.** A classroom is one learning environment but not the only one. Working through problems in environments outside the classroom such as nature and the community builds greater understanding and connection to the world. We focus on three systems: natural, social, and built environments.
- **Ecoliteracy.** At its core, ecoliteracy means all systems in the world (natural, social, and built) are interconnected, and the decisions we make as people in communities and the world ripple through these systems. This is systems thinking, and systems thinking is the basis of ecoliteracy.
- **Authentic learning.** We educate students by having them grapple with issues rooted in relevant, real-world problems.
- **Whole Child.** ECS serves the whole child - keeping them healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged.

## With structures/systems to support connections to students:

- **Looping.** Looping is the practice of one grade-level team educating the same group of students through more than one school year. 3rd and 4th grade loop at the intermediate, while 5th grade does not. The 5th grade academy has a dedicated team of teachers that prepare students for middle school.
- **Inclusive Practices.** ECS values general and special education as a unified system with the inclusion of all students at the heart of what we do. Students with disabilities are included as a part of their grade level and school community, while still getting the individualized support and instruction they need for success. ECS's commitment to inclusive practices means that there are <u>no specialized, higher-level special education classrooms within ECS Intermediate</u>, including life skills, emotional support, Autistic support, and multiple disabilities support. ECS does offer itinerant and supplemental

levels of support for students identified with a specific learning disability, intellectual disability, Autism, other health impairment, and emotional disturbance. These occur in flexible special education spaces to allow students to remain with general education peers to the maximum extent possible across their day. Itinerant-related services, including speech and language, occupational therapy, physical therapy, vision therapy, and hearing support are also offered within the ECS system.

- **Teaching Teams.** Educators work as a grade-level team to develop and engage students in a variety of learning experiences. Each room has a general education teacher that is supported by paraeducators and assistant teachers. Educator-to-student ratios remain small (averaging 1:10), allowing students to get targeted support and enrichment.
- **Specialized Teaching.** Grade-level teachers specialize in one or two content areas. These “expert” teachers integrate content across disciplines. Students or teachers move between grade-level classrooms for instruction.

## With mission-specific instructional practices that support all students:

- **Workshop Model.** The Workshop Model has four basic parts: opening, mini-lesson, work time, and debriefing. It is a framework that can be used in any content area.
- **Multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS).** Teachers use MTSS to create standards-aligned, culturally responsive, high-quality instruction; universal screening; data-based decision-making; tiered services and supports; and family engagement. ECS uses specific scheduled time each day to work on student-centered supports.
- **Differentiation.** Teachers tailor instruction to meet individual needs. Teachers differentiate content, processes, products, and/or the learning environment. The use of ongoing assessment and flexible grouping makes differentiation a successful approach to instruction.
- **Technology integration.** Teachers integrate the use of technology within the classroom in authentic and meaningful ways. Technology supports curricular goals.
- **Sustainable Development Goals:** By incorporating the 17 Sustainable Development Goals set forth by the United Nations into their curriculums and experiential learning, teachers hope to foster a sustainable worldview within students, giving them the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to help create a safer and just world.

# Program Overview

## Building Content: Academic Blocks

### Mathematics

The ECS Math Program follows the focus and coherence of the PA Common Core Standards and uses Eureka Math as a curricular resource. The mathematics block is composed of engaging and purposeful learning opportunities that prioritize students' academic mindset with an emphasis on collaborative problem solving, reasoning, and critical thinking. Students work in whole groups, small groups, and partnerships to explain their thinking and participate in guided practice. Students learn through open-ended tasks, hands-on materials and manipulatives, and game-based activities that build fluency.

The 3–5 math program is focused on making meaning of and building fluency with multiplication and division, building an understanding of fraction and decimal concepts and computation, and extending and expanding knowledge of the base ten system, geometry, measurement, and data.

### Literacy

Our 3–5 literacy team continues to support students' decoding skills as they build their reading comprehension skills with increased attention to vocabulary acquisition, fluency, comprehension, and writing about reading. During this block of time, students engage in interactive read-alouds, explicit vocabulary instruction, grammar and spelling lessons, and alternating reading and writing workshop lessons supported by small group instruction.

Through interactive read-alouds, teachers encourage students to think about and discuss both fiction and nonfiction texts. While reading, the teacher and students discuss the texts and learn about different literary elements such as main ideas, details, character development, themes, text features and so much more. These interactive discussions reinforce concepts of print and genre knowledge. Interactive read alouds present endless opportunities for teachers to introduce strategies that will develop students' comprehension skills.

Grammar and spelling instruction are taught in an additional block.  Teachers use the Patterns of Power program for grammar instruction which ties reading and writing together in an inquiry approach to grammar and conventions. For spelling, ECS uses the Spellography curriculum which is grounded in the Science of Reading. Spellography emphasizes the development of insight into why words are spelled the way they are and how spoken language corresponds to written language. It follows a systematic progression through language components that build on one another, including phonology, orthography, morphology, and syntax.

Additionally, students participate in Reading and Writing Workshops. In grades 3–5, Reading Workshop work shifts heavily towards comprehension focusing on inferential and analytical thinking about reading. Writing instruction continues to spiral around 3 genres of writing, Narrative, Informational, and Opinion with essay writing becoming increasingly more important. Each workshop begins with a mini-lesson targeted around a particular skill or strategy. After learning about the skill or strategy, students are given time to practice the skill during independent reading and writing time while teachers work with small differentiated groups to remediate or extend literacy skills.

### Environmental Literacy (EL)–Education for Sustainability

The Environmental Literacy (EL) Block (K–5th grade) is an integration of concepts and knowledge of the sciences and social science at the elementary level. The EL Block strives to educate students to make informed decisions, both individually and with others, concerning the environment and the community, and be willing to act on these decisions to improve the well-being of other individuals, societies, and the global environment. The Environmental Literacy Block connects students with their "place," and ultimately encourages active civic engagement.

### My Excellence Time ("ME Time")

**M**y **E**xcellence **Time** is daily time dedicated to intensely practicing Math and Literacy skills that students have been learning. The groups are differentiated based on ECS's Multi-Tiered Support System (MTSS) data. Students split into spaces across the building, and the activities are geared to support or enrich students based on their individual needs.

Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) involves quality core instruction, assessment and intervention to ensure that ALL students receive the level of support they need for success. The Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) is a school-wide, data-driven, proactive framework for improving learning outcomes for all students. It utilizes evidenced-based practices and effective systems to improve core instruction and intervention. It gives students immediate access to academic support through a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS).

### Continued Learning (3–5)

Students develop content knowledge and thinking skills through authentic routines, habits, and practice as well as by engaging in larger group and individual projects. Therefore, we provide the following guidelines as you support your child at home: Encourage your child to read each day and complete homework as assigned by the teacher. Our maximum amount of homework is at 10 minutes per grade per night (ie. 30 minutes for 3rd, 40 minutes for 4th, 50 minutes for 5th)

## 5-Day Specials Rotation

Specials are classes that all students visit over the course of a 5-day cycle. Teachers remind parents/guardians of the daily cycle in a weekly newsletter.

### Edible Schoolyard

In Edible Schoolyard, students learn to grow, harvest, and prepare nutritious, whole foods during the school day. Students gain an understanding of how the natural world sustains us, how food can build and connect communities, and how to maintain a healthy lifestyle through their hands-on kitchen and garden experiences.  In garden classes, students learn to plan, plant, harvest, and maintain the garden. In kitchen classes, students read recipes, prepare fresh produce, and chop, slice, and dice with real knives. In the community, events are held to celebrate the bounty of the garden and healthy eating.

### Music

The music program at ECS Intermediate builds upon the musical experiences previously learned in Primary.  Students will continue to imitate, explore, and create while singing, changing, playing instruments, and dancing. These musical skills will enable them to begin to read music in order to sing together or alone, play the recorder or beginning band instruments, and finally perform as young musicians. Students will be prepared to succeed at the Middle School level in addition to having the confidence to learn a musical instrument.

### Thinking Lab

The Thinking Lab builds a foundation for understanding the intersections and connections between art, science, and design. Students develop the capacity to think like scientists and artists, with a focus on foundational techniques and processes. Students learn to communicate through the language of visual arts, while simultaneously developing creativity, collaboration, and craftsmanship skills.

### Physical Education

The Physical Education department promotes student engagement in lifelong activities, with a focus on becoming knowledgeable about the resources within their urban environments. The attributes the physical education department has identified as essential for this work are: Engagement, Knowledge, and Lifelong Activities.

### Spanish

ECS's exploratory program aims to give students a foundation for foreign language study. In Spanish, students are introduced to basic phrases, general vocabulary, and grammar themes in order to sharpen listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills and familiarize students with the notion that thoughts can be expressed in another language. ECS's goal is to give our young students a small glimpse into the world of the Spanish language - through exciting, authentic

experiences with culture -  and encourage them to continue their study of the world and its languages, long after they move on from our ECS school community.

## Schedule of an Intermediate Student

Sample:

| | |
|---|---|
| 7:55–8:15 | Student Arrival |
| 8:15–8:45 | Morning Meeting/Social/Emotional Learning Lessons |
| 8:45-9:20 | MY Excellence Time (Literacy) |
| 9:20-10:45 | Literacy |
| 10:45-11:10 | Recess |
| 11:10–11:35 | Lunch |
| 11:40–12:30 | Specials (Thinking Lab, PE/Health, Music, Edible School Yard, Spanish) |
| 12:30-1:20 | Environmental Literacy/Grammar |
| 1:20–1:50 | Typing Club |
| 1:50–2:40 | Math |
| 2:40–3:15 | MY Excellence Time (Math) |
| 3:15–3:45 | Pack up/Dismissal |

## Assessment/Report Cards

**Percentage Grading Scale (Grades 3–5)**

The following grading scale is implemented:

A: 90%--100%
B: 80%--89%
C: 70%--79%
D: 60%--69%
I: 59% and below

## Food Services

ECS believes that the future success for the next generation is a positive and healthy understanding of food. We strive to bring fresh, kid-friendly, exciting and delicious meals to students.

ECS is dedicated to providing healthy options for breakfast and lunch, and at least 75% of our food is from scratch and never frozen!

ECS offers breakfast and lunch and provides a daily snack.
Classrooms are nut-free, but nuts ARE permitted in the cafe.

# Out-of-School Time Programming

## After School Care

ECS partners with Venture Outdoors, for after-school care programming at the Intermediate School.

## Half-Day Adventures, Athletics, and Clubs

ECS offers half-day adventures to engage K–5 students in themed fun days, along with clubs and athletics to help build skills, knowledge, and friendships.  To learn more, visit https://ecspgh.org/after-school-programs.

# Transportation

Transportation is provided by the school district that you reside in. For example, if you are a resident of the City of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh Public Schools provides transportation.  Always check with your school district to make sure transportation is available.

# Cultural Celebrations

ECS is dedicated to equity, diversity, and inclusion. When a student's learning environment respects their history, values, beliefs, and traditions, students and their families are better positioned to thrive in school. ECS's K–5 program has monthly cultural celebrations that connect students to different cultures and heritages through exploring literature, music, art, food, and more!

# Technology Grades 3–5

At the Intermediate School, students have access to 1:1 Chromebooks. ECS's mission is to grow citizens, and in this changing world, that also means building 21st-century skills and becoming digital citizens. Having 1:1 at ECS empowers teachers and students to harness the power of technology to connect, collaborate, create, communicate, critically think, and access learning and understanding in the 21st century.

All students will have access to Google Apps for Education (G Suite) accounts. With Google Apps, students can access Google Classroom, Drive, Docs, Sheets, Sites, and Slides that will support and enhance learning. They will NOT have access to Gmail.

All of our learning management systems adhere to the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) and our student network has additional smart filtering. Our classrooms also use GoGuardian, which allows for safe, digital experiences.

## School Dress Code/Uniform

The ECS uniform policy and dress code guide support the work that we engage in each day at school. Your support of this guide helps to ensure that our students are comfortable and safe. Thank you for your support of our school uniform policy and dress code guidelines.

| | |
|---|---|
| Pants, Shorts, Skorts or Jumpers | Khaki, black or navy blue pants, shorts, skorts, and jumpers (including cargo style, excluding sweatpants, yoga pants, and spandex shorts/leggings). *The proper length of skirts, dresses, and shorts is determined by the fingertips being able to touch material, not skin, when a student's arms are extended at his, her, or their side.* |
| Tights, Leggings or Knee Socks | May be worn **under** uniform skirts or dresses and should be white, khaki, light blue, navy blue, black or gray. Leggings can not be worn as pants. |
| Shirts (warmer weather) | White, light blue, navy blue, or gray shirts-polo or oxford style, long or short sleeved (No sleeveless tops, t-shirts, or crop tops). |
| Shirts (colder weather) | White, light blue, navy blue, black or gray sweaters, sweatshirts or turtlenecks. Hooded sweatshirts may be worn but hood must be kept down when in the school building. ECS sweatshirts are acceptable. |

**Come to School Prepared to Engage in Outdoor Learning**

ECS students engaged in 2,100 outdoor learning experiences last year. Due to the nature of our curriculum and the amount of time spent outdoors, we suggest that each student keep one extra uniform outfit and one pair of old shoes/rain boots at school at all times. This ensures t  students are prepared, even when an impromptu lesson develops. Families may also choose to send students to school in footwear that is appropriate for daily outdoor experiences.

# Positive School-Wide Behavior Program

## House System (3–5)

Houses play an important role in the school as they help foster a community spirit and support a sense of belonging for each child. The house system contributes to students' general well-being and emotional development. It also allows the students to interact with different children (younger and older) which will in turn develop their empathy and strengthen their ability to support their peers.

Students earn points for their house by demonstrating the 3 B's (Be Safe, Be Kind, Be Responsible) or exhibiting House Character Traits (Unity, Commitment, Courage, Compassion).

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| House of Courage | House of Unity | House of Commitment | House of Compassion |

## Relaxation Station

Each room has a space designed to teach and promote everyday self-regulation skills with a calmer and more private space. All students are welcome to use tools and strategies at the Relaxation Station to help their mind, body, and heart get ready to learn. Students have multiple lessons on feelings identification, self-awareness, and strategies to help manage big feelings. These lessons are part of weekly SEL (social-emotional learning) lessons that are taught in each home base classroom.

# Student Supports and Services

## Student Services Personnel

- 1 School Counselor in each building
- 1 Social Worker in each building
- 1 School Nurse in each building
- 3 School Psychologists (K–12)
- 1 Director and 1 Associate Director of Special Education (K–12)

## PCO

ECS is proud of its robust Parent Community Organization (PCO). The mission of the PCO is: to represent the voice of parents alongside the school administration and staff; to serve the greater Pittsburgh community and to maintain a positive presence therein by being a model and advocate of sound environmental practice; to engage in innovative and effective fundraising and development activities; and to enhance the educational experience and personal growth of students, teachers, and families.
PCO-related questions can be emailed to: parents@ecspco.org

# ECS Enrollment FAQs

Please visit enrollecspgh.org for our enrollment FAQ's.

ECS encourages all prospective families to take a tour of our building to see the program in action. Tours are typically scheduled during the open enrollment period from October to January. Tour dates are added to the website in September and can be found here: https://www.enrollecspgh.org/ECS-School-Tours.