

Welcome to the Primary School

Grades K–2



Our Mission

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. We grow citizens.

Our Vision

Every ECS graduate will be an actively engaged citizen driving thoughtful change in the world around them.

Environmental Charter School

ecspgh.org

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Table of Contents

What makes ECS different?	3
How we do it.	3
Program Overview	4
Building Content: Academic Blocks	4
Mathematics	4
Literacy	5
Environmental Literacy (EL)-Education for Sustainability	5
Core Values	5
My Excellence Time (“ME Time”)	6
Playful Learning	6
Specials- 4 day rotation	7
Discovery (K–2)	7
Music	7
Thinking Lab	8
Physical Education and Health	8
Schedule of a Primary Student	9
Additional Notes About Your Child’s Day	9
Food Services	9
Home Connection (K–2)	10
After School Care	10
Transportation	10
Cultural Celebrations	10
School Dress Code/Uniform	10
Additional Resources and Information	11
Positive School Wide Behavior Plan	11
PCO (Parent Community Organization)	11
Check Out Our Unique Spaces!	11

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What makes ECS different?

The mission of the Environmental Charter School (ECS) is to educate each student to high academic learning standards using innovative curriculums that will foster knowledge, love of, and respect for the environment and the will to 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 a greater understanding and connection to the world. We focus on three systems: the natural, social, and built environments.
- **Ecoliteracy.** At its core, ecoliteracy means all systems in the world (natural, social, 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 and educating for sustainability.
- **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. Kindergarten is self-contained.
- **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 not full-time specialized, higher-level special education classrooms within ECS’s buildings, 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. There is a general education teacher in each room that is

supported by paraeducators and assistant teachers. Educator to student ratios remain small (averaging 1:12), allowing students to receive 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:

- **Project-Based Learning (PBL).** Teachers use PBL to guide students through inquiry-based learning that often includes an end-of-unit exhibition to a public audience. Teachers develop units with a question, design activities and projects that support inquiry, and work with students to construct knowledge throughout the journey.
- **Workshop Model.** The Workshop Model has four basic parts: opening, mini-lesson, work time, and debriefing. It is a framework that is 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 make differentiation a successful approach to instruction.
- **Sustainable Development Goals:** By incorporating the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals into their curriculums and experiential learning, teachers 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

In mathematics, ECS Primary aligns all instruction to the PA Common Core Standards with a focus on number sense, place value, addition, subtraction, geometry, measurement, time, money, data and graphing to ensure students emerge with strong foundational skills that prepare them for advanced math concepts.

Using Eureka Math² as the main 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.

Literacy

The ECS literacy team works to build students' skills in the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, language comprehension, fluency, reading comprehension, and writing. During this block of time, students engage in daily read alouds, shared reading lessons, daily phonics lessons, and alternating reading and writing workshop lessons supported by small group instruction.



Through teacher-led read alouds, teachers encourage young students to think about texts both fiction and non-fiction. While reading, the teacher and students discuss the texts, thinking about literary elements in fictional texts and the main ideas, details, and text features in informational texts. Read alouds also offer endless opportunities to build young students' vocabularies as they listen and learn from books. Shared readings support students' language development as they chorally read texts. Repeated readings provide “just right” scaffolding for students to focus on word solving, vocabulary, and comprehension skills across a series of lessons.

Teachers use the University of Florida Literacy Institute (UFLI) Phonics to engage students in a daily whole group phonics lesson. UFLI Phonics is a science of reading-aligned phonics program that uses a systematic scope and sequence. Teachers explicitly teach phonemic awareness, letter and sound recognition, blending, segmenting, and word-building skills. They work with decodable texts to build fluency.

Writing instruction is organized around core genres, narrative, informational, and opinion, providing students with regular, meaningful opportunities to plan, draft, revise, and share their work. Each lesson begins with a focused mini-lesson that introduces a specific writing skill or strategy, allowing students to build their craft intentionally over time. Students then engage in independent writing to apply what they have learned, while teachers work with small, differentiated groups to offer targeted support through remediation or enrichment. This structure nurtures student voice, encourages risk-taking, and fosters stamina, confidence, and independence as writers.

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 sciences 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 world. The EL Block connects students with their “place,” and ultimately encourages active civic engagement.



Environmental Literacy is a core block that combines science and social studies and features:

- An integrated curriculum that allows students to pursue learning in a holistic way.
- Inquiry/Play-based instruction that enhances the development of 21st century skills and the expertise and dispositions of a global citizen.
- Out-the-door learning experiences that create opportunities for students to examine real

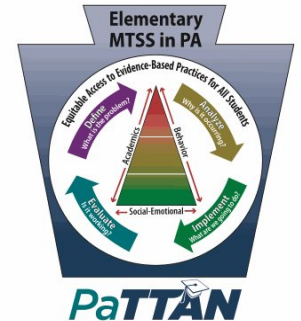
world-issues, think critically about the relationship between humans and natural systems, and see the world from others' perspectives.

- A whole child approach that encourages students to deepen their natural curiosity and their eagerness to want to discover and learn more.

My Excellence Time (“ME Time”)

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

MTSS involves high-quality core instruction, assessment, and intervention to ensure that ALL students receive the level of support they need for success. 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 Response to Intervention (RTI).



Playful Learning

Playful learning is when children develop their imagination and physical, cognitive, and emotional strengths. As they master their world through **playful learning**, children grow new competencies that enhance confidence and the resiliency they will need to face future challenges.

In a playful learning classroom:

- Learning is developed by students' interests, exploration, curiosity, and experimentation.
- Learners work together to answer questions that are relevant and fascinating to them.
- Learners don't expect to get everything right the first time but can learn from their failures, delight in their discoveries, and understand that mistakes are opportunities.
- Learning is based on skills and values that the students transfer and apply what they are learning in school to the real world.



Building the Whole Child: Different Opportunities to Learn

Specials- 4 day rotation

Specials are classes that all students visit over the course of a 4-day cycle for 60 minutes per day. Teachers remind parents/guardians of the daily cycle in a weekly newsletter.

Discovery (K–2)

During Discovery, students will participate in research-backed, play-based activities that promote physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development. Play-based learning is child-centered, engaging, and imaginative, fostering a love of discovery and exploration, encouraging curiosity, and developing a desire for lifelong learning. Opportunities to enhance literacy, math, science, and social and emotional skills are provided in a meaningful context, where students will learn to solve problems, try out new ideas and experiences, and explore the world around them.



Outdoor Play	Mini Lesson
Adventure Fantasy & Imagination Animal Allies Maps & Paths Special Places Small Worlds Loose Parts Harvesting & Caring for the Garden	Mindfulness Emotions Working Together Observation Our Garden Connection to Nature

Music

The music program at ECS Primary gives students opportunities to imitate, explore, and create whether they are singing, chanting, playing instruments, or dancing. Each grade builds on the musical experiences and skills taught in the previous year(s), and kindergarten begins with repetition to help students learn musical routines. Students frequently learn skills through movement before transitioning those movements onto instruments, singing, or reading music. Students work on doing before seeing, which means that they have many experiences with rhythms before visualizing those patterns. This leads them to more success.



Thinking Lab

- The ECS Thinking Lab helps students explore meaningful connections between the disciplines of art, science, and design through an integrated curriculum.
- 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.
- ECS uses the Next Generation Science Standards and National Art Standards, in combination with the PA Common Core Science standards.

Kindergarteners will explore:

- Materials, elements of art, weather, engineering & design, the moon, the sun, and life cycles



1st graders will explore:

- Animals through arts, birds, engineering & design, light, manmade vs. natural, signs of spring (bees & flowers)



2nd graders will explore:

- Self-portraits, food chains through elements of art, LEGO stop motion, art made from recycled materials, artist studies, a plant needs for survival



Physical Education and Health

Students are encouraged to engage in different lifelong activities by incorporating play, fun, choice, basic skill development, teamwork, and sportsmanship. Students work on their level in order to develop competence and confidence to take part in a range of physical activities throughout their lifetime.

ECS Primary's health curriculum focuses on topics such as nutrition, hygiene, emotional well-being, and making safe choices. Activities include discussions, interactive videos, and hands-on learning to understand how to take care of our bodies and minds. Students reflect on their health habits and set goals for healthy living.



Schedule of a Primary Student

Sample:

8–8:20	Student Arrival
8:20–8:50	Morning Meeting/Social/Emotional Learning Lessons
8:50–9:20	Phonics
9:20–10:20	Math & MY Excellence Time (Math)
10:20–10:50	Lunch
10:50–11:20	Recess
11:20–12:10	Reading
12:10–12:30	Writing Workshop
12:30–1	Literacy Small Groups/ MY Excellence Time (Literacy)
1–2	Specials(Thinking Lab, PE/Health, Music, Discovery Block)
2–2:10	Snack
2:10–3:10	Environmental Literacy
3:10–3:20	Pack up/Ready for Dismissal

Primary School Assessment/Report Cards

Digital quarterly report cards show student progress in each content area.

Standards Based Grading

This developmentally appropriate grading system measures progress against a uniform standard for individual skills by providing specific information about how a student is performing on individual skills and concepts within a subject area.

The student performance levels of 1 to 3 indicate whether students have met the state expectations and if the student has the necessary skills for success in the next quarter or grade.

Additional Notes About Your Child's Day

Food Services

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

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

- ECS offers breakfast and lunch and provides a snack.
- ECS participates in the Free and Reduced Lunch Program.
- Classrooms are nut-free, but nuts ARE permitted in cafe



Home Connection (K–2)

In weekly newsletters, there are curricular connections that families can do at home and read with their child every day!

After School Care

ECS partners with the YMCA of Greater Pittsburgh for its after-school care at the Primary School. The YMCA's core values of caring, honesty, responsibility, and respect closely aligns with ECS's to grow active, engaged, and thoughtful citizens.

Additional After-School Program Questions?

To learn more about out of school time opportunities, please visit

<https://ecspggh.org/out-of-school-time-activities>

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.

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. The K–5 program participates in monthly cultural celebrations that connect students to different cultures and heritages through exploring literature, music, art, food, and more!



School Dress Code/Uniform

The ECS uniform policy and dress code guide supports engagement each day at school. Your partnership with this guide ensures that 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 or navy (including cargo style, excluding sweatpants and yoga pants)
Tights, Leggings, or Knee Socks	May be worn under uniform skirts or dresses and should be white, khaki, light blue, navy blue, or gray. Leggings can not be worn as pants.
Shirts (warmer weather)	White, light blue, black, gray or navy blue polo or oxford style, long or short sleeved (No sleeveless tops or t-shirts).
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.

Additional Resources and Information

PCO (Parent Community Organization)

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.

Learn more about the PCO at <https://ecspgh.org/pco>.

ECS Enrollment FAQs

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

ECS encourages all prospective families to tour the building to see the program in action. Tours are typically scheduled during the open enrollment period. Tour dates are added to the website in September at <https://www.enrollecpgh.org/ECS-School-Tours>.

Check Out Our Unique Spaces!

Relaxation station

Relaxation Stations are found in every room throughout grades K–5 and are designated spaces equipped with materials to help students reflect on their feelings and use strategies to manage feelings when needed. Ideally, this self-awareness and use of tools/strategies is taught and practiced so that students remain in the classroom as much as possible and can be used responsibly and independently which also limits the loss of instructional time.



Positive School Wide Behavior Plan

ECS has three clearly defined behavioral expectations, defined in positive, simple rules that are used in all school-wide functions. The 3B's for the ECS Primary School are:

- **Be Safe**
- **Be Kind**
- **Be Responsible**

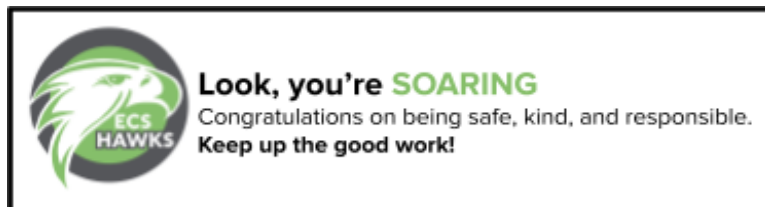
Hawk Tickets



If a student is observed demonstrating one or more of the 3B's, the student is awarded a hawk ticket. Hawk tickets are used like currency and exchanged for special classroom experiences and other fun opportunities. ECS Primary is recognized as a top school for its PBIS program.

SOAR-ing Students

Whenever a student is observed going above and beyond our standard exemplary “Be Safe, Be Kind, Be Responsible”, they receive a SOAR-ing card that they bring to the office to put in our treasure chest. They receive a large SOAR-ing sticker (to show off their accomplishment), they get to sign our large SOARING poster, and are put in a weekly drawing for an extra principal surprise on Fridays.



Look for a Class Nest Egg Chart (in classrooms)

Students get eggs placed in their ‘nest’ for full class positive behavior. When the nest fills up, the entire class gets an award, which may include extra recess, a book reading by the principal, or bringing a fuzzy friend to school.

Outdoor classroom

If you exit out the front door, please turn left and see our garden. If you walk through the garden, you will see our outside classroom space.

Playground

In August of 2018, the primary school opened its playground for students to enjoy during recess and summer events. The addition of the playground was made possible by the hard work, dedication, and excellence of the entire ECS community including staff, families, and other community stakeholders.



Learning Targets

Learning targets are designed for students, in student-friendly language, to guide students' learning for the day. Learning targets are posted so students understand the goal for the day.

Sustainability 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 more safe and just world. Look for posters around the school

Cafe

Stop by the cafe and see our composting and recycling efforts. ECS contracts with a local organization called Community Kitchen to prepare our food. 75% of our food is made from scratch and never frozen.