

Ellerhorst Elementary School

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August 17, 2020

Dear Ellerhorst Families,

On behalf of the faculty and staff of Ellerhorst Elementary, I would like to welcome you back to the new 2020-21 school year. This year will be like no other than in the history of our 60 years as a school, or in the history of education. We listened to the concerns of our community, and all our teachers and staff are returning and have been working extra to ensure your child receives the best education possible in this unique era, filled with positive experiences.

Schedule

We begin this year in Distance Learning on Monday, August 17. Your teachers have reached out to you to provide the contact information for their class as well as the login information for the homeroom meeting, which will meet every morning, including Monday, at 10:00 a.m. Students will learn from home, and use their district issued Chromebook to access their class through either Seesaw (Kindergarten through 2nd grade) or Google Classroom (3rd through 6th grade). Tutorials for both platforms can be found on our website.

After homeroom, your child will participate in their learning by either attending small group virtual meetings, additional whole class virtual meetings, or work on assignments as directed by their teacher. Your child can also meet with your teacher during office hours, as scheduled by the teacher.

On Fridays, teachers will conduct family outreach, and meet with their classes in homerooms. Then, after homeroom, your child will work on assignments on their own, while teachers work on their own development and training. Additionally, there will be time for wellness or social-emotional support, or just time to catch up. Details on this will come soon.

Of course, during this first week, teachers will be focusing less on curriculum, and using their office hours and family outreach time differently. Much of these first few days together will be spent building relationships as a class. As educators, we will be fostering that sense of belonging in this new, decentralized world to build up more engaged learners.

Back to School Night

Your teachers are looking forward to meeting you at our Virtual Back to School Night on Tuesday, August 18, where they will discuss the expectations and exciting plans for their class for the upcoming year in Distance Learning. They will also take questions and answers. Primary

classrooms (Kindergarten through 3rd grade) will meet 6:00-6:45 p.m., and Intermediate classrooms (4th through 6th) will meet 6:45-7:30 p.m.

Communication with Families

A new way our school will be using to communicate with you is ClassDojo. We will use it to send reminders from our teachers, our staff, and myself throughout the year. You can use it to send messages directly back to us. Please connect any family member you want by following the instructions from your teacher.

In addition to ClassDojo, we will also communicate with you through Parent Link, the automatic phone messaging system (my “robo calls”), that also come with emails and texts. Please make sure you have your contact information updated in PowerSchool. Parent Link messages also connect to the new district app. You can look for that where you find your apps, just look for “WCCUSD.”

Of course, we will still communicate with you using our e-tree, created and maintained by our PTA, and you’ll still get flyers through Peachjar. Oh, and I’ll do what I can to remember to keep our electronic board in front of our school updated.

Family Involvement

In this era of Distance Learning, our efforts to volunteer for our school and fundraise will look very different, but be even more necessary. We have great family organizations where you can make connections with other parents and help support our school by joining our two parent support organizations: the Ellerhorst PTA and the Ellerhorst Dads’ Club.

Attendance and Engagement

We care that every child participates and engages in the classroom experience in order for them to learn to the best of their ability. We will track attendance by seeing them in the homeroom in the morning or other virtual meetings during the day. They can still be marked present on an occasional basis if they participate on assignments and submit them prior to 2:30. If the teacher does not see evidence of them, they will be marked “absent,” and a phone call will be made to you. This is to support you in monitoring your child’s activity in the class. We will continue to request notes to excuse any absence, just as before.

Teachers will also monitor “engagement.” So, even if a child “attends” a virtual meeting, we want to make sure they are engaging in the school assignments. We will reach out to you so you can best support your child if the teacher does not feel your child is adequately engaged in the class.

How to Support Your Student In Distance Learning

Teachers will reach out to you to give you tips on how to support your child depending on their age and your living situation. Aside from continued communication with the teacher, generally, it is advisable to:

- find your child a **designated learning area** in the home, that can be **free from distractions** as much as possible
- have their **materials ready** and nearby where they are working
- make sure their Chromebooks are **charged** or at least plugged in

- make sure your child is **on time** to the virtual classes, and turn in assignments on time
- make sure they **follow the classroom expectations** as communicated by their teacher
- keep regular bedtimes, and continue with established **routines**
- remember to be **safe**, be **respectful**, be **responsible**, and be **an ally**.

You can find more best practices on the web, such as [at CommonSense.org](https://www.commonsense.org)

Final Thoughts

A teacher wrote recently that we have learned we cannot be angry and grateful at the same time. I recognize that many may feel many negative emotions about how these times are putting us all in seemingly unbearable situations. But I recognize that for every family concern, question, complaint or challenge to us as a school, it tells us that someone cares deeply about their child's well being and their education. It is not lost on any of us as a staff that you entrust us with the education of your child. With us not being in the same building, we need to work harder, and bring you along.

Someone else pointed out we are now in the business of educating generations, and we recognize that we have no choice but to bring you as parents, grandparents, and neighbors along with us as we help our children learn. While it may be a cliché by now, it still is a truism, that "we are in this together." And we are stronger together.

We have shed tears for not being able to be with and hug your children, but we know we will be back together again. Meanwhile, we continue because this is important. We know you and your child can do this. And we will not give up on any of you.

We continue to ask everyone to be patient, understanding, flexible, and kind to one another. We are looking for a great school year, and we are excited to welcome all of you back to a new school year of learning and growing.

Mr. Greg Whaling
Principal