

## Save the date!

Details on the calendar at  
[easternmennonite.org](http://easternmennonite.org)

**March 1-2, 7 p.m. March 3, 3 p.m.** – *Fiddler on the Roof*, high school musical, EMS Auditorium  
[easternmennonite.org/tickets](http://easternmennonite.org/tickets)  
\*snow date March 5, 7 p.m.

**March 28, 8:15 a.m.** – Family Visit days for middle and high school students  
[easternmennonite.org/visit](http://easternmennonite.org/visit)

**April-May** – Touring Choir and Chamber Choir perform at various locations, full schedule at  
[easternmennonite.org/tour](http://easternmennonite.org/tour)

**April 4, 8:15 a.m.** – Family Visit days for middle and high school students  
[easternmennonite.org/visit](http://easternmennonite.org/visit)

**April 17, 6 a.m. - 8 p.m.** – Great Community Give

**April 25, 6:30 p.m.** – EMES spring concert, EMS Auditorium

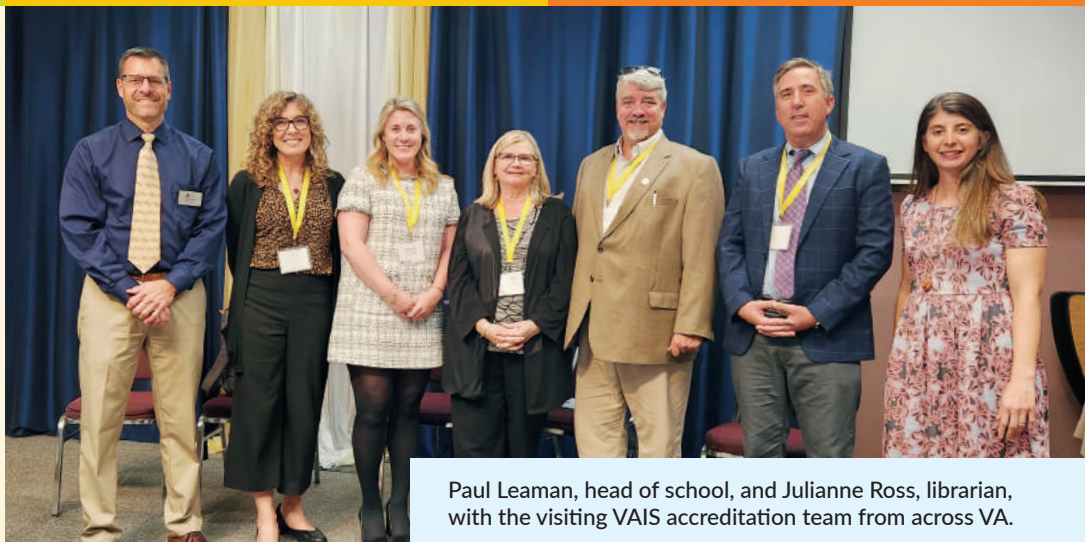
**May 3, 8 a.m.** – Fore the Flames Golf Tournament, Heritage Oaks  
[easternmennonite.org/golf](http://easternmennonite.org/golf)

**May 10-11, 7 p.m.** – *Twelfth Night*, Middle school play, EMS Auditorium, pay what you will.

**May 16, 7 p.m.** – Middle School spring concert, EMS Auditorium

**May 30, 7 p.m.** – Commencement Concert, EMS Auditorium

**June 1, 3 p.m.** – EMHS Commencement, EMU Lehman Auditorium



Paul Leaman, head of school, and Julianne Ross, librarian, with the visiting VAIS accreditation team from across VA.

## Celebrating Academic Excellence

Over the past 18 months our dedicated staff worked diligently towards EMS's 10-year accreditation renewal with the Virginia Association of Independent Schools (VAIS) visiting team. As part of this process and through a community survey in 2022, we affirmed and updated our vision and mission, and crafted a new dynamic strategic plan!

Nancy Foy, the team's chair, shared "our team was impressed with the kindness and warm hospitality we experienced during our visit. **The school truly sees and cares for each student and member of the community. Students feel seen, known, and supported.**" The visiting team commended EMS for its strong sense of community

and professional culture of collaboration.

Our commitment to relationships, restorative practices, peacebuilding, and the holistic development of our students received recognition. As we celebrate this accreditation success, our faculty and staff continue to find ways to work towards our vision to be a learning community where every student belongs, thrives, and joins God's work in the world.

*I am extremely grateful for our incredible faculty and staff who make lessons come to life, for our students and their families who are eager learners, and our expanded EMS community who support the school making it a wonderful place of learning and growing. Thank you!*

—Paul Leaman, Head of School



## Congratulations to Maria Archer and Jesse Blosser!

Virginia Association of Independent Schools (VAIS) honored Maria Archer, k-5 principal, and Jesse Blosser, head of the math department, with the 2023 Innovation in Education award. We want to thank them for their remarkable contributions to education.

As the founding principal at EMES, Maria Archer's innovative leadership has transformed the early childhood division, emphasizing experiential learning and fostering a restorative culture. Jesse Blosser played a crucial role in supporting colleagues, and advocating for students' math needs. Additionally, Blosser introduced computer programming courses and an elective called "adulting 101," helping prepare students for the challenges of the 21st century. His innovative thinking and willingness to try new approaches have enhanced students' educational experience.

Both Archer and Blosser exemplify dedication and creativity that positively impacts their school community.

## A Place of Belonging: A Closer Look at 6th Grade

As the school year reaches its midpoint, 6th grade students at EMS discover a profound sense of community beyond academics. Guided by the dynamic duo of Mr. Martin and Ms. Huyard, 6th grade serves as a nurturing space, providing belonging and support during the pivotal transition from elementary to middle school – one that many adults don't reflect on fondly!

Mr. Martin notes, "middle school signifies a blend of newfound freedoms and increased personal responsibility. While there are more students per grade in middle school, small class sizes allow teachers to tend personal needs." Drawing from their own experiences as alumni, they aim to ease growing pains for students. Ms. Huyard shared, "our goal is to guide the students through their initial days and months in middle school with comfort and understanding."

Both Ms. Huyard '17 and Mr. Martin '76 not only bring years of teaching expertise but a personal connection to students and the school's mission. Viewed as family, they create a familial atmosphere within the classroom. Charlotte Wright, 6th grade student, praises Mr. Martin and Ms. Huyard for



Mr. Martin's puppies visit for puppy therapy.

their hands-on teaching methods, including their interactive labs. Students speak highly of this dynamic teaching duo, expressing gratitude for the invaluable support during this pivotal year.

Beyond classroom roles, Ms. Huyard's involvement in the theater department enhances creative experiences, while Mr. Martin's passion for raising boxer puppies adds a unique dimension to the classroom, creating memorable moments for students during puppy therapy visits.

Programs like our Bigs and Littles pair 6th grade students with a junior or senior student, bridging connections. Throughout the year there are "bigs/littles" events during lunch to help build community within our school. It gives the new student a sense of belonging and our juniors and seniors look forward to the activities and relationship building.

Through the unwavering support of teachers like Mr. Martin and Ms. Huyard, students not only navigate this critical transition but thrive in a community that values belonging and holistic development.







6-12 mass choir and instrumental ensemble for Handel's Messiah. Photos by Joaquin Sosa

## Fine Arts Department

Teachers Maria Lorcás, Nick Gardner, and Jared Stutzman have built on the program crafted by previous music directors. The school's leadership strategically prioritized these programs, ensuring that every middle school student has daily, year-round engagement with music.

Many students take string classes at EMS in grades 6-12, and some also participate in string ensembles and full orchestra. Ms. Lorcás and Mr. Gardner introduce all 6th grade students to an instrument at the start of the school year. This daily learning sets the stage for an impressive Christmas concert where students showcase their progress with only three months of solid practice.

Singers from EMS touring choir, concert choir, and middle school choral united to perform selections from Handel's Messiah in November (pictured above). Jared Stutzman orchestrated this masterpiece, beautifully bringing together voices and an instrumental ensemble.

The collaborative efforts of directors, faculty, and students have yielded triumphs in concerts and productions. As the anticipation builds for the upcoming production of *Fiddler on the Roof*, March 1-3, it reflects the continued vibrancy of the fine arts community at EMS. Mark your calendars for a weekend filled with theatrical brilliance!

*"All three faculty members pursue excellence because excellence is worth pursuing. I am grateful for the school's placing such a high priority on the fine arts. It's one of its most distinctive features, and very good for our students and our communities."* —Mark Rankin, EMS parent

## Board of Directors

Read more about each member at [easternmennonite.org/about/board-of-directors](http://easternmennonite.org/about/board-of-directors)

Amy Mumbauer  
*Acting Chair*

Michael D. Weaver '86  
*Treasurer*

Shannon W. Dycus  
*Secretary*

David Berry

Andrew Fairfield '03

Kristin Ellen Fink

Susan Godshall

Janie Swartz '77 Heatwole

Moriah Hurst

Scott P. Rogers

Luke Roth-Mullet

Kendal Swartzentruber

Loren Swartzendruber

Andrew Zapanta '93

## Strategic Leadership Team

Paul Leaman  
*Head of School*

Maria Bender '81 Archer  
*Elementary School Principal*

Erika Gascho  
*Middle School Principal*

Justin King  
*High School Principal*

Trisha Maust '95 Blosser  
*Director of Advancement*

## 11 Musicians Triumph in District Honor Band Auditions



The annual District Honor Band auditions showcase the musical talent of middle and high school students. Students from 20 middle schools and 19 high schools participated this year, with Eastern Mennonite School sending 13 musicians. Remarkably, 11 students secured a seat in the honor band, with eight earning 1st or 2nd chair positions. Their dedication and achievements highlight the school's commitment to musical excellence. EMS's band teacher, Nick Gardner, initiated a unique challenge last year: he offered to partially shave his beard for every student excelling in district honor band auditions. Gardner might need to sharpen his razor, anticipating continued success in the years ahead. To see the full list of students, visit us online, and click news.

# Dynamic Strategic Plan

*Four strategic pathways guide us closer to the vision of EMS.*

## 1. CULTURE: *Who we are together, and how we care for each other.*

EMS seeks to foster a learning community where every student feels a sense of belonging through internal efforts to create a welcoming and safe environment. Strengths include personalized relationships, dedicated time for gatherings, and a focus on collaboration and positivity. We will continue to grow in our understanding of the sense of belonging and the use of restorative practices.

## 2. COMMUNITY: *How we reach out, engage, and serve a diverse world.*

EMS values student involvement with internal and external communities, aiming to prepare them for a life of service and success in a diverse world. Strengths lie in the emphasis on community building, guided by Palmer Becker's summary: "Jesus is the center of our faith; community is the center of our life; and reconciliation is the center of our work." EMS would like to provide more time and creative encouragement for student, faculty, and staff interactions with external community members. These efforts could be shifted to become more integrated into our curriculum.

## 3. CURRICULUM: *How we grow and actively engage in learning.*

EMS seeks to be a learning community of academic excellence providing the educational foundation for students to be lifelong learners, thrive in life, and maximize their potential for joining God's work in the world. EMS emphasizes experiential learning, diverse academic exposure, and robust programs like Advanced Placement, robotics/STEM, and internships. EMS strives for collaboration among faculty for interdisciplinary learning frameworks (writing, presentation, faith formation, field/project experiences), and further developing the ability to address diverse learning needs.

## 4. CAPITAL: *How we sustain, develop, and grow supporting resources to best reach our vision.*

EMS capital opportunities range from deferred maintenance to new construction and support our long-term sustainability. Major renovations will ensure the safety and comfort of our building, as the physical plant ages. Enrollment pressures for our elementary program justify exploration of an additional K-5 section, with new classrooms. An auxiliary gymnasium for winter sports and K-12 physical education programs would benefit all students. EMS is presently debt-free with strong support for the We Gather campaign, positioning us well for future campaigns. Endowment funds create opportunities for legacy giving, and we will strive to include operational endowments as part of new project developments.

[easternmennonite.org/strategic-plan](http://easternmennonite.org/strategic-plan)



elementary peace parade



cross-grade connections



experiential learning



science labs



# Advancement Team Update

The advancement team focuses on fundraising, donor relations, alumni engagement, marketing, and overall institutional growth...we “advance” the mission of the school!

Advancement enthusiastically welcomed Abigail Cook to our team as admissions counselor. Ms. Cook is ordained through the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and has completed leadership training with the Kansas Leadership Center. Her dream for EMS is that it would be a place to practice what we feel called to in Jesus, so that we spread hope and learn to be bearers of the way of peace. If you know family or friends interested in learning more about joining EMS, she welcomes your call or email! 540-236-6021, [cooka@easternmennonite.org](mailto:cooka@easternmennonite.org)



Abigail Cook,  
admissions counselor

## CHRISTMAS FUND DRIVE

As of January 29, 445 supporters gave 488 gifts totaling \$156,022 for the Christmas Fund Drive this year. Thank you for responding when students, faculty, or staff reached out by mail, phone and personal contact! Our goal is for students to share their EMS experience, learn communications skills, and build connections with our alumni and supporters.



students write to supporters

## SCHOLARSHIPS

Endowed scholarships, tuition assistance, and discounts can make the difference for student access to our learning community. Endowed funds provide long-term sustainable support, often for specific initiatives like the **Carmen Strite Miller Leadership Scholarship** or the **Multicultural Scholarship**. The **EMS Alumni Endowment Fund** combines general class endowments into one fund to support financial aid.

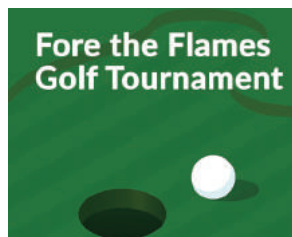
## GREAT COMMUNITY GIVE

EMS will join the GREAT COMMUNITY GIVE on Wednesday, April 17, 2024. Our local Community Foundation's celebration of philanthropy benefits dozens of nonprofits that make our community strong. Help us meet our goal to increase support for tuition assistance for students!

[easternmennonite.org/gcg](http://easternmennonite.org/gcg)

## GOLF TOURNAMENT

Mark your calendars for the annual Golf Tournament to benefit student financial aid and our athletic program: May 3, 2024 at Heritage Oaks Golf Course in Harrisonburg. Sign up individually or grab a team of four. Details and registration at [easternmennonite.org/golf](http://easternmennonite.org/golf)



## Homecoming 2024 – Oct. 18-19

Nominate an alumnus from a class ending in 4 and 9 to recognize during Homecoming Weekend, Oct 18-19, 2024. Submit a nomination online at [easternmennonite.org/alumni](http://easternmennonite.org/alumni) and help us celebrate alumni.



## HIGH SCHOOL MUSICAL: FIDDLER ON THE ROOF

Join us for the EMHS theater department production of *Fiddler on the Roof*, a timeless musical masterpiece set in the fictional Russian village of Anatevka. The story follows Tevye, a Jewish milkman, as he grapples with tradition, family, and change amidst political and social upheaval. This production promises a captivating blend of humor, heart, and reflections on the human experience. Performances on March 1-2 at 7 p.m. and March 3 at 3 p.m. in the EMS Auditorium. Visit our website to purchase tickets.

Today is written by Christine Coddington, communication specialist, and designed by Lindsey Kolb. Editorial support from Trisha Blosser, director of advancement, and Paul Leaman, head of school.

Send feedback to  
[today@easternmennonite.org](mailto:today@easternmennonite.org)

Find past issues at  
[easternmennonite.org/today](http://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](mailto:OCR@ed.gov) or 800-421-3481, TDD 800-877-8339.

## VISION

Eastern Mennonite School aspires to embody the love of Jesus as a learning community where every student belongs, thrives, and joins God's work in the world.

## MISSION

Eastern Mennonite School, with home and church, invites students to faith in Jesus Christ, academic excellence, personal integrity, and compassionate service.

## FOLLOW US:



Ben Bixler's Bible class knots comforters for a service project.

## CORE VALUES

We believe in the integration of our values in all we learn and live.

## WE VALUE

Our Students  
Caring Community  
Constructive Thinking  
Leadership Development  
Service  
Peacebuilding

## FAITH PRACTICES ENCOURAGE

Relationship with Jesus  
Biblical Discernment  
Stewardship  
Partnerships between  
Parents and Churches  
Following Jesus Christ  
Cultural, Racial, and  
Socioeconomic Diversity  
Singing Together  
Walking with Each Other in Love