Welcome to Information Night at The Emerson School!

We're glad you are able to join us for our Information Night, and we look forward to answering any questions you might have. Tonight's presentation will last about 40 minutes, with the remainder of the time devoted to Q&A. If we are not able to get to all your questions, you can send remaining questions via email to info@emersonschool.org and we will be sure to answer.

We have quite a lot of information to cover tonight, so to help you get as much out of the program as possible, we have supplemented our presentation with the information in this packet. There are also links on most of the pages for further information online.

Information includes the following:
- What is a Charter School?
- Mission and Principles of The Emerson School
- Why Teach with Project Learning?
- An Overview of The Project Approach
- The Story of a Project
- Why Champion Social and Emotional Learning?
- Positive Discipline
- Literacy and Math Curriculum Elements
- Kindergarten Age Policy

Welcome and enjoy!

The Emerson School Staff

What is a Charter School?

The Oregon Public Charter School Legislation (ORS 338) was passed in May 1999 to encourage the creation of new, innovative and more flexible ways of educating all children within the public school system. Through the authorization of public charter schools, the Legislature created an avenue for parents, teachers, and community members to take responsible risks while remaining accountable to the state and local school districts for school performance.

- Charter schools are public schools in every way, funded through the state the same way as a standard district school. **There is no tuition charged to attend a charter school**, though full-day kindergarten fees may apply (as in any public school).

- Charter schools are non-religious by law.

- A charter school is an independent public school, sponsored and monitored by either the school district in which it resides or the Oregon Department of Education. (The Emerson School is sponsored by the Portland Public School District.)

- A charter school will be approved by a district based on its ability to meet a specific need in the school community; for example, by serving a specific population, targeting an **under-served** neighborhood, or by providing an innovative approach that, once proven effective, may be applied to other public schools.

- Charter schools must meet all state benchmarks and district testing requirements, as well as any additional benchmark requirements as determined by the district in the charter agreement. Charter schools often are subject to greater accountability in that a charter school may be closed down if the conditions of the charter with the district are not met.

- Charter schools provide for greater local and internal control and allow for more flexibility and innovation than their district counterparts.

- Charter schools are "schools of choice." Students may choose to attend the charter school even if the school is not in their attendance area.

- Charter school enrollment is determined by lottery.

Mission and Principles of The Emerson School

The mission of The Emerson School is to provide a developmentally appropriate, meaningful, and challenging education for a diverse group of children in an environment that recognizes, values, and responds to their individual abilities and needs. We will nurture compassionate, capable, and life-long learners who see themselves as being engaged members of their communities whose actions can make a positive difference.

The Emerson School is committed to achieving equal educational and employment opportunity and equitable outcomes regardless of address, income, disability, gender, religious preference, sexual orientation, language, nationality, race or ethnicity.

The Emerson School is committed to the following principles, which compliment the mission and values of the Portland Public School District.

We will:
- Maintain the highest level of academic and non-academic expectations for all students.
- Provide students with a strong grasp of fundamental concepts and skills in an environment that fosters curiosity, debate, and excitement for learning.
- Value each child as a truly unique learner by providing support on their own developmental timetable.
- Create a school environment in which children are active partners with their teachers.
- Provide children with ongoing opportunities to construct meaning about the world and time to process this meaning for deeper understanding.
- Provide an environment, which incorporates stimulating and challenging materials and activities that foster children's creativity, involvement, and intrinsic motivation for learning.
- Provide an integrated curriculum, which continuously builds on students' previous learning and experiences in a strong, supportive community.
- Be an integral part of the community and its natural environment. We will maintain a bridge between The Emerson School, the community, and the natural environment, each of which will serve as a resource and extension of the classroom.
- Create an environment in which students are contributing members of the school and larger community.
- Integrate, honor, and celebrate individual and community diversity.
- Create an environment in which all members of the school and community have the capacity to be both teachers and learners.
- Provide parents the opportunity to play a key role in the school community.
- Implement a variety of authentic assessment tools as a vital component of both the learning and accountability processes.
- Recruit students from all quadrants of the Portland Public School District.

Why Teach with Project Learning?:
Providing Students With a Well-Rounded Classroom Experience
(From www.edutopia.org/project-learning-intro)

Project learning is a dynamic approach to teaching in which students explore real-world problems and challenges, simultaneously developing cross-curriculum skills while working in small collaborative groups.

Because project learning is filled with active and engaged learning, it inspires students to obtain a deeper knowledge of the subjects they're studying. Research also indicates that students are more likely to retain the knowledge gained through this approach far more readily than through traditional textbook-centered learning. In addition, students develop confidence and self-direction as they move through both team-based and independent work.

In the process of completing their projects, students also hone their organizational and research skills, develop better communication with their peers and adults, and often work within their community while seeing the positive effect of their work.

Because students are evaluated on the basis of their projects, rather than on the comparatively narrow rubrics defined by exams, essays, and written reports; assessment of project work is often more meaningful to them. They quickly see how academic work can connect to real-life issues—and may even be inspired to pursue a career or engage in activism that relates to the project they developed.

Students also thrive on the greater flexibility of project learning. In addition to participating in traditional assessment, they might be evaluated on presentations to a community audience they had assiduously prepared for, informative tours of a local historical site based on their recently acquired expertise, or screening of a scripted film they have painstakingly produced.

Project learning is also an effective way to integrate technology into the curriculum when developmentally appropriate. A typical project can easily accommodate computers and the Internet, as well as digital still cameras, video cameras, and associated editing equipment.

Kids who are excited about what they learn tend to dig more deeply and to expand their interest in learning to a wide array of subjects. They retain what they learn rather than forget it as soon as they disgorge it for a test. They make connections and apply their learning to other problems. They learn how to collaborate, and their social skills improve. They are more confident talking to groups of people, including adults. As a number of research reports suggest, project learning correlates positively with improved test scores, reduced absenteeism, and fewer disciplinary problems.

An Overview of The Project Approach*

Project Definition:
A project is defined here as an in-depth investigation of a real world topic worthy of children's attention and effort. The study may be carried out by a class or by small groups of children. Projects can be undertaken with children of any age. They do not usually constitute the whole educational program. Younger children will play and explore as well as engage in projects. Older children's project work will complement the systematic instruction in their program.

The Project Approach refers to a set of teaching strategies which enable teachers to guide children through in-depth studies of real world topics. The Project Approach is not unstructured. There is a complex but flexible framework with features that characterize the teaching-learning interaction. When teachers implement The Project Approach successfully, children can be highly motivated, feel actively involved in their own learning, and produce work of a high quality.

Project Descriptions:
Project work offers children opportunities to do first hand research in science and social studies and to represent their findings in a variety of ways. Children also have many occasions in the course of their project work to apply basic math and literacy skills and knowledge.

The description of a project can be like a good story with a beginning, middle, and an end. Teachers and children can tell the story with reference to these three phases in the life of the project.

Learning:
Classrooms increasingly contain groups of children with a wide range of individual differences. These differences include various physical, perceptual and mental disabilities, as well as giftedness in children who need academic challenges of various kinds. There are also classes of children who are different in age, children with different ethnic origins and those who speak English as a second language. All these children require provision which is responsive to their special individual needs within the regular classroom. Many schools are now seeking alternatives to the traditional system. These alternatives are challenging some of the instructional methods which were particularly effective when children in the regular classroom were expected to learn and achieve in similar ways.

It is also being increasingly recognized that children have a much wider range of capabilities than they have usually been permitted to show in the regular classroom. In order to show these capabilities, however, they need learning environments which are responsive to the many individual differences which influence learning. Some children, for example, have a special interest in, and early mastery of, symbol systems. Others understand best through much and varied hands-on manipulative experience. Children learn in different ways, have different styles, and build on very different backgrounds of experience. Children also achieve at a higher level in school if they are interested in what they are doing and interests can vary considerably within an average class group.

Both research and developments in education have recently led to instructional innovations designed to make the classroom into a learning environment which is more responsive to the varying learning needs and interests of individual children. For example, there is increasing curriculum integration: continuity between the children's learning in the different subjects. There is more opportunity to relate home and school learning. There is concern for memorable learning as well as memorized learning. Children are expected to work cooperatively on complex and open-ended tasks as well as follow instructions in step by step learning. The Project Approach provides one way to introduce a wider range of learning opportunities into the classroom.

The Story of a Project

Sylvia C. Chard
University of Alberta, CA

A project is an in-depth study of a real world topic. Projects can be said to develop through an introductory phase, a research phase and a review phase. This three phase temporal structure helps the teacher to organize and guide the progression of the study in ways which accord with the development of the children's interests and personal involvement.

Preliminary Planning
First the teacher selects the topic of study based on the children's interests, the curriculum goals, and the availability of local resources. The teacher also brainstorms his or her own experience, knowledge and ideas, representing them in a topic web. This web can be added to throughout the project and can continue to be useful for planning and recording the progress of the project.

Phase 1
The teacher discusses the topic with the children to find out about the experiences they have had and what they already know. The children represent their experiences in a variety of ways and show how well they understand the concepts involved in explaining their observations. The teacher helps the children ask questions about what they would be interested in investigating. A letter is sent home to parents about the study to invite them to talk with their children about the topic and to see if anyone can offer special expertise.

Phase 2
The teacher arranges opportunities for the children to do field work and speak to experts. Resources are provided to help the children with their investigations; real objects, books and other research materials. The teacher suggests ways for children to carry out a variety of investigations. Each child is involved in representing what they are learning and each child can work at his or her own level in terms of basic skills, drawing, music, construction, and dramatic play. The teacher enables the children to be aware of all the different work being done through class or group discussion and display. The topic web designed earlier provides a shorthand means of documenting the progress of the project.

Phase 3
The teacher arranges a culminating event for the children to share what they have learned. They can be helped to tell the story of their project to others. They can feature its highlights for another class, the principal, and/or the parents. The teacher helps the children to select material to share and in so doing involves them purposefully in reviewing and evaluating the whole project. The teacher also offers the children imaginative ways of personalizing their new knowledge through art, stories and drama. Finally the teacher uses children's ideas and interests to make a meaningful transition between the project being concluded and the topic of study in the next project.

PROJECTS web site: http://www.project-approach.com
Chard S.C. (1998 *The Project Approach: Making Curriculum Come Alive.* Scholastic
Chard S.C. (1998 *The Project Approach: Managing Successful Projects.* Scholastic
Katz, L.G. & Chard, S.C. (2000 *Engaging Children's Minds: The Project Approach.* (Edn.2 Ablex.
Chard, S.C. (2001 *The Project Approach: Taking a Closer Look.* CDROM; Prospect CDs.

Why Champion Social and Emotional Learning?
(from www.edutopia.org/social-emotional-learning-intro)

It's not enough to simply fill students' brains with facts. A successful education demands that their character be developed as well. That's where social and emotional learning comes in. Social and emotional learning is the process by which students develop the skills to manage their emotions, resolve conflict nonviolently, and make responsible decisions.

Although family, community, and society are significant factors in fostering emotional intelligence and character development, educators must create a safe, supportive learning environment and integrate social and emotional learning into the curriculum.

Research shows that promoting social and emotional skills leads to reduced violence and aggression among children, higher academic achievement, and an improved ability to function in schools and in the workplace. Students who demonstrate respect for others and practice positive interactions, and whose respectful attitudes and productive communication skills are acknowledged and rewarded, are more likely to continue to demonstrate such behavior. Students who feel secure and respected can better apply themselves to learning. Students who are encouraged to practice the Golden Rule find it easier to thrive in educational environments and in the wider world.

Educators and other students coach children in conflict resolution and model how to negotiate, how to discuss differences in opinion without resorting to personal attacks, and how to accept others when their attitudes, beliefs, and values differ from one's own. Social and emotional learning strives to educate children about the effects of harassment and bullying based on social standing, race, ethnic origin, or sexual orientation.

Teachers lay the groundwork for successful social and emotional learning by establishing an environment of trust and respect in the classroom. Empathy is key. Before children can be expected to unite to achieve academic goals, they must be taught how to work together, and so it provides them with strategies and tools for cooperative learning.

Such learning, successfully incorporated into project learning is easily integrated into all subject areas and can be effectively assessed with rubrics. It also contributes to a productive classroom environment where students feel they can learn without concern for their emotional welfare.

Positive Discipline

Positive Discipline is a philosophical model that teaches important social and life skills, in a manner that is respectful to both the adults and the children in the situation—raising young people to be responsible, respectful, and resourceful members of their community. It is based on the theory that children who have a sense of connection to their community (home and school), and whose input is regarded as meaningful, are less likely to engage in misbehavior. To be successful members of the community children need to be taught the necessary social and life skills. Positive Discipline is based on the understanding that discipline must be taught and that discipline teaches.

Jane Nelsen gives the following criteria for effective discipline that teaches:

Effective Discipline…
1. Helps children feel a sense of connection. (Belonging and significance)
2. Is mutually respectful and encouraging. (Kind and firm at the same time.)
3. Is effective long-term. (Considers what the child is thinking, feeling, learning, and deciding, about himself and his world—and what to do in the future to survive and thrive.)
4. Teaches important social and life skills. (Respect, concern for others, problem solving, and cooperation as well as the skills to contribute to the home, school or larger community.)

The Positive Discipline model is based on creating mutually respectful relationships. The methods use both kindness and firmness and are neither punitive nor permissive. The tools and concepts of Positive Discipline include:

- Mutual respect. Adults can be firm by respecting themselves and the needs of the situation, and kind by respecting the needs of the child.
- Recognizing the reasons kids do what they do. Identifying the belief behind the behavior.
- Teaching problem solving and communication skills.
- A focus on discipline that teaches (and is neither permissive nor punitive).
- Focusing on solutions instead of punishment.
- Encouragement (instead of praise)

Literacy

Literacy at The Emerson School is taught and practiced throughout the day and across the curriculum. The children learn to read, write, speak, and listen in a variety of settings. During project work, both in the classroom and out in the field, students apply reading and writing skills and learn by listening to experts. In math class, children write about their findings and thought processes and talk about solving problems. As they sing and create, they read along and express themselves. And, as class meeting participants, students listen to each other and share their ideas aloud.

Literacy instruction includes the following curriculum components: Interactive Read Aloud and Literacy Discussion; Shared Reading/Performance; Writing about Reading; Writing; Oral, Visual and Technological Communication; Phonics, Spelling and Word Study; and Guided Reading. During Guided Reading students read a teacher-selected text in a small group. The teacher provides explicit teaching and support for reading increasingly challenging texts. At the upper grade levels, Book Clubs replace Guided Reading instruction.

From The Continuum of Literacy Learning, Grades PreK-8: A Guide to Teaching, Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell, 2011.

Mathematics

Our math curriculum, Bridges 2nd Edition, is also used by Portland Public Schools and was developed with initial support from the National Science Foundation. Bridges emphasizes the need for a deeper understanding of math before engaging more abstract concepts and achieves this by offering year- long lesson plans in which major mathematical concepts spiral throughout the curriculum, allowing students to revisit topics numerous times in a variety of contexts.

Bridges features a combination of whole-group, small-group, and independent activities. Lessons incorporate increasingly complex visual models - seeing, touching, working with manipulatives, and sketching ideas - to create pictures in the mind's eye that help learners invent, understand, and remember mathematical ideas. By encouraging students to explore, test, and justify their reasoning, the curriculum facilitates the development of mathematical thinking for students of all learning styles. The program allows students to build skills through each grade level with common models, teaching strategies, and objectives, with a major focus on problem-solving in each strand.

Students are assessed as they begin each new unit of study, and they are taught at the level at which they are working, with extended practice for those who need more time in an area, and challenge work for those who are ready to move to more complex applications of the topic.

In conjunction with the Bridges curriculum, students regularly participate in integrated, complex assignments in which they apply the concepts and skills they have learned to more open-ended, hands-on, and creative tasks. These activities may range from creating 3-dimensional models of a garden, to attempting to create the longest paper chain possible using only one piece of construction paper. Each of these is designed to illicit and support creative problem solving, perseverance, abstract reasoning, modeling with mathematics, attending to precision, and developing an understanding of mathematics and their uses in the real world.

From http://www.mathlearningcenter.org.

Kindergarten Age Policy

Children entering Kindergarten at The Emerson School must be five years old as of September first. Because we strongly believe in developmentally appropriate practice, we are committed to maintaining blended classrooms comprised of socially and academically ready children. We value meeting the needs of each individual child while simultaneously meeting the needs of the group. In order to provide this education for a K/1 class, we must designate a cutoff date. We appreciate that this date may feel arbitrary, but as a matter of policy, we are unable to be flexible with it. If your child has a birthday after September first, please expect to enroll them the following year.

Many children have birthdays that fall within mere days of the cut-off date. As educators, years of experience have proven to us that erring on the side of an older, rather than younger, child will benefit the child in a myriad of developmental ways. Additionally, this benefit presents itself in years to come, as children egress and enter developmental stages. A child may not show peer discrepancy in his or her early school years. However, these differences frequently present themselves in later years as children age during their school career. These discrepancies, either physical, emotional, social, or academic, are impossible to predict in a child's early years of schooling, and can be detrimental to a child's well-being and adjustment in his or her school community.

For the sake of consistency, a date must be assigned which will apply to all applicants. To make an exception for one child, but not another, would contradict our principles of equity and fairness. There are no exceptions to this policy.