



EASTSIDE

CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

SCHOOL BOARD
NEWSLETTER
FALL 2020

FROM THE PRINCIPAL

Mr. Jim Holstege

Anno Domini...2020...In the Year of the Lord. A year that we will never forget.

As we reflect back upon all that has transpired, we will certainly remember many events that have taken place to cause fear, distrust, and suspicion. Think about the raging wildfires in Australia and the western United States. Hurricanes and typhoons. Political polarization in our country, causing riots, protests, and corruption. A global pandemic bringing the world to her knees. So much trouble and uncertainty ... unrest and chaos!

For good reason, we have taken as our theme this school year: **God's Faithfulness**. We move forward each day, instructing the children of God's covenant that blessed truth, using the words of Psalm 36:5 "Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens; and Thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds." The hallways ring with the sound of children's voices singing the refrain: "For His mercy doth endure, Ever faithful, ever sure!"

Because of God's Faithfulness, we are safe, and we are strong. We have every reason to be happy! This is our twenty-fourth year as a Christian school on the east side of Grand Rapids. Through His preservation of us, both materially and spiritually, we continue to do the work of the good Christian school.

In close connection, we take this opportunity to express our gratitude to God for Mr. Pete Adams. Pete has been used for all these twenty-four years to provide godly instruction and a godly example to all who have passed through the classrooms of Eastside Christian School. His formal employment came to an end last school year, but Pete continues to serve as a member of the Education Committee and as a member of the Foundation Board. Pete, we thank God for your faithfulness!

1ST-2ND, 3RD-4TH GRADE FIELD TRIPS | OLIN FARMS





The Education Committee has been busy over the past 6 months, adjusting to a COVID environment while continuing to focus on improving the quality of education at Eastside.

In response to increased enrollment and the need to adjust certain class sizes, the committee recommended the realignment of grades 1 through 6. This realignment added the 2nd grade to Anita Haak's 1st grade classroom, combined grades 3 and 4 in Kristi Thompson's classroom, and reduced Tyler DeVries' classroom to two grades – 5 and 6. This realignment results in a large classroom size for Anita, so we have arranged for full-time aides to assist her. Heidi Van Baren and Lori Pastoor are working under Anita's direction to support her in this work. The reconfiguration of the library space has been invaluable in accommodating separate learning spaces during the school day.

It has always been our intent to schedule our teachers so they can teach to their subject area strengths. We have been able to do that even more this year, assigning Andy Kuiper more math and science instruction and Tyler DeVries more history and social studies classes, while continuing to take advantage of Kristi Thompson's abilities in the language arts areas. We are thankful for the talents these teachers have and are glad we can take full advantage of them.

We are excited about the work Anne Miedema is doing to assist our teachers in helping students who have special learning needs. After several years of not using their services, we have again contracted with All Belong (formerly known as Christian Learning Center). Anne is serving as our school contact with All Belong and is facilitating communications between All Belong and our teaching staff. Besides supporting our teachers in this

area, Anne is also taking responsibility for our AIMSweb testing. She is able to dedicate time to examining test results and identifying areas which may need more attention. We believe these steps will enable us to more effectively identify and address learning challenges.

Additionally, we have encouraged our staff to take advantage of some of the online resources available to us to support and reinforce the classroom work our students do. This includes especially the IXL math program, but others as well. These tools can be used to focus on specific subject matter, strengthening areas in which individual students may need extra work.

All of this has been done in the shadow of the prospect that some or all of our students and staff may be required to be home for a period of time due to our COVID response. This summer we began planning not just for the return to school but also the possibility that a significant amount of remote teaching and learning may be necessary. We have worked with Jim Holstege and our teaching staff to identify educational priorities in the event of an extended shutdown and how those classes will be taught – through live online instruction, through recorded online instruction, and/or through some other form of instruction. Our staff has had to use some online instruction already this year, and we are appreciative of their willingness to do what is necessary to continue to teach our students regardless of circumstances.

We are thankful that we can be busy in work to continue to improve the education we provide our students at Eastside. This is a continuous effort, but we are building on a strong foundation. To God be the glory!

NEW FAMILY WELCOME | THE DYKSTRAS

The Dykstras are technically not a new family, since they enrolled in Eastside for the Winter semester last school year, so we have been enjoying their presence at Eastside for a while. Josiah is in 8th, Eli is in 6th, Ruthanne is in 4th, and Micah is in 2nd. They have a younger sister and also older siblings at home. The Dykstra family lives in Rockford and attends Free Reformed Church. Welcome, officially!





TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE REPORT

Brian Baldwin

Perhaps more than any year in recent memory, there has been no shortage of opportunities for the Technology Committee to be involved and serve the needs of our Eastside community. In God's Providence, we continue to be faced with many unique pandemic challenges and new hurdles to overcome. Having experienced a "trial run" earlier in the Spring, we have thankfully been able to carve out a strategy that seems to be working well.

The primary component of our technology resources continues to rely on Chromebooks and the associated Google environments. The goal already back in 2019 was to expand our usage of Chromebooks, cycling out some of the older units and replacing them with more updated devices. This concept apparently is not isolated to Eastside as we've discovered Chromebooks are still in high demand and have been difficult to obtain in mass quantities. The eventual goal is for each student to have their own assigned Chromebook versus sharing amongst the student body. This allows for better tracking and monitoring of how each Chromebook is being used, ensuring the higher quality units are available for the grades that rely on them more, and as an added bonus helps to keep them sanitized.

Shut-downs and mandatory quarantining also drove the committee to invest in high-end standalone webcams to facilitate remote learning. Each classroom has been fitted with a webcam so at-home students can participate interactively and in real time. Additionally, each teacher has been equipped with a webcam at home in the event they themselves are required to quarantine, enabling them to conduct classes from an off-site location.

Students and teaching staff alike have familiarized themselves with Google Classroom for assignments, homework, and parent communication. Email is more frequently in use and video conferencing plus other applications. Testing programs continue to be used regularly to gauge student proficiency in the core subjects of math and reading. These tools have all been an invaluable resource for maintaining a level of teaching excellence and student engagement.

A special thanks is in order for the Eastside Promoters for funding much of these technology solutions. It is certainly rewarding to see their efforts put to good use in so many beneficial and practical ways. As with any good gift of God, our calling is to ensure that these resources are used for purposes of the Kingdom, glorifying His name in the work we do. We thank Him for providing us with these means to help fulfill the school's mission that our students grow to reflect the mind of Christ.



THE WHITELEY FAMILY | REMOTE LEARNING

Bethany Whiteley

Jimmy and Katherine Whiteley are doing their schoolwork remotely this year due to the COVID19 pandemic. With the reality of student quarantines and possible school shutdowns, we anticipate more students needing to use this option temporarily (and a good number already have!). So we asked Bethany Whiteley to write about their experiences so far.

This school year has been very different for us! With two children having medical conditions that cause them to have a higher risk for Covid-19 complications, we decided that it would be best if they all did their schooling at home, at least for the time being. We are so grateful that Eastside has been accommodating for this!

So, right now, Jimmy and Katherine are doing all of their schoolwork remotely. Their classrooms have webcams and computers so they are attending all of their classes in real time, but at home. Our mornings still begin at the appropriate time: 8:15 a.m., when class starts. I have made the rule that our kids have to have breakfast eaten, be dressed, teeth brushed, hair combed, etc. just like they normally would be. They have recess time at the same time as the at-school kids, and get done at 3:00 p.m., just like everyone else. This consistent schedule is beneficial! There is some free time during school hours, during periods where the other students have PE class, choir, or orchestra. This extra time works out well for Jimmy and Katherine to fit other things in – practicing violin or piano, learning catechism, or getting some extra time to run around outside (that counts as PE, right?).

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Remote learning can be difficult. There are always technical kinks that pop up – the very first day we had an internet outage that sidelined everyone for a while! But we worked that out and thankfully haven't had that problem since. There has been a learning curve with figuring out what to do when the headphones aren't working, the mute function is on and we can't figure out how to turn it off, somehow someone X'd out of everything accidentally and can't figure out how to get back on, someone's login isn't working, etc. I consider myself the Level 1 Tech Support, but if I can't get it figured out I summon Jordan from his basement office and he can pretty much figure out anything. Thankfully.

One thing we have learned is how important the mute button is! The ongoing rule is that you turn your mute button on unless you need to talk. That works great until someone forgets! For the most part everyone remembers this but once in a while it gets missed. One particular instance I remember is Jimmy practicing his violin (quite loudly) during one of his free periods while our other son Milen was in the middle of a virtual class. Milen had inadvertently untapped the mute button so his whole class was subject to some loud (albeit beautiful) violin playing over the course they were conducting. His teachers were nice enough not to say anything but I felt like it probably didn't add anything to the class. Ha! So we learned our lesson.

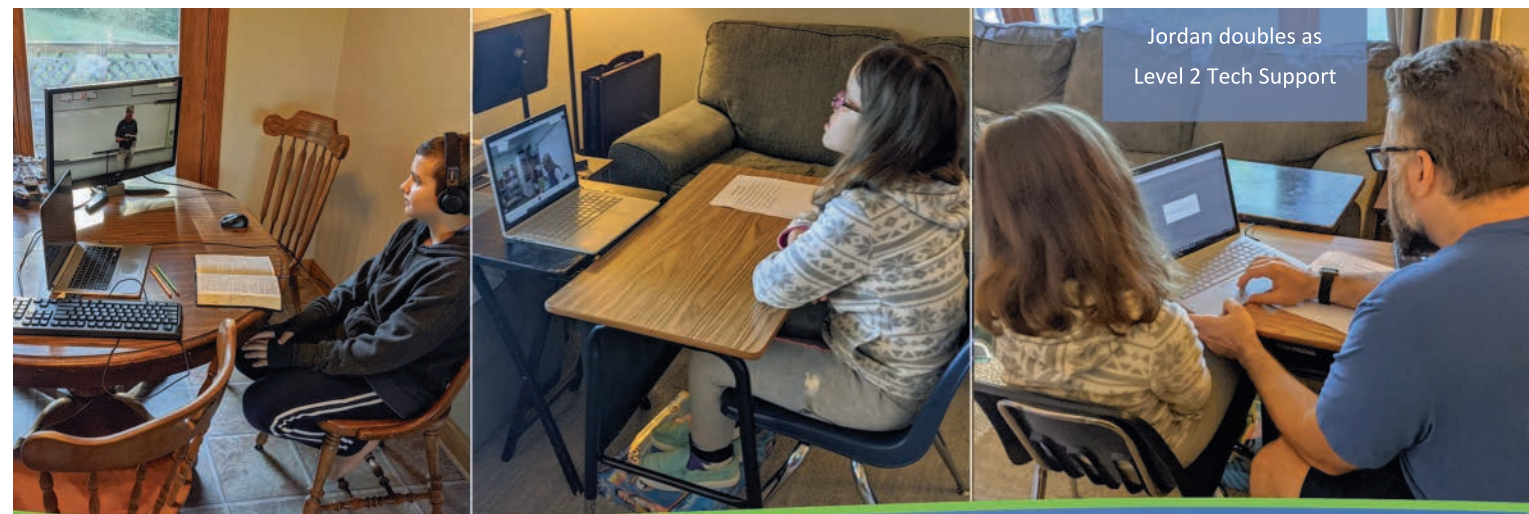
What are the struggles? Most of all, Jimmy and Katherine miss their friends, of course! It's wonderful to see them on screen, but that is no replacement for the real time fun that they would usually be having. That has been a trial for them and we look so forward to when they can get back to normal with all the things they have typically been doing. Jimmy did go on the Bike Hike in September, which was one of the highlights of his month.

What are the positives? Well, we are enjoying the family time that comes with this forced slow-down lifestyle. The kids are always able to get all their school work done during school hours, so there is generally no homework to be done in the evenings. This has been a welcome change, and one we are enjoying.

Someone asked me if my kids felt bad to miss the monthly hot lunch. Well, yes, I'm sure they would say they would miss the pizza and pop...but then I answered that actually my kids now get hot lunch pretty much every day! No more relying on a lukewarm thermos lunch or having to stand in a long microwave line. This is one of these small things that we have appreciated.

We are so thankful that the Eastside teachers have taken this virtual learning business in stride. We realize it's not easy for anyone! Yet they have made it so that our kids are thriving. Mr. Holstege makes it a priority that the weekly all-school devotions are webcast, so that our kids can participate in that too. We have also been able to have web access to the monthly chapels, which are so important as well! We appreciate this so much.

As I mentioned before, we are looking forward to the day when the kids can be back attending school in person. But until then, we plan to keep on making the best of it!





March 13, 2020 was a strange day. The Board decided to close school to prepare for a government mandated shutdown that aimed at mitigating the rapid spread of the COVID-19 virus. Over the next several days a plan was formed by the Board, teachers, and Education Committee. Over the next few weeks, the plan was massaged and tweaked in order to provide our students with optimal learning during an unusual setting. Everything was new, experimental, unknown, and strange.

In our homes, during this same time, many of us were also making adjustments and left with many questions. Will I have enough business? How much does unemployment pay? Am I essential? Many valid concerns were arising on the financial impact of the shutdowns.

It was under these circumstances that I saw some very strange behavior by parents at Eastside. Some contacted me to check on their tuition balance, some to assure me that the money was coming, some to make sure the school's financial needs were being met. Strikingly, our parents showed that one of their priorities during the uncertainty was tuition.

I witnessed wonderful proof of the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of our families, as they didn't react as the world did by hoarding cash, looking for ways out of paying tuition, complaining that the moms had to teach while still paying. I saw hearts that acted in obedience to Romans 12:2 "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." When we are not conformed to this world, we become a strange people – strange to the world around us and strange to our sinful flesh. Praise God for His work in our hearts, and please continue to support our school with your prayers, your time, and with your giving.

NEW FAMILY WELCOME



THE THOMPSONS

Hi! We are the Thompsons and are very excited to be starting our journey of Christian education as a family. Molly is in pre-k and is loving school. We recently moved from Hudsonville to the northeast side to be closer to church, work, and especially school! When dad is away he is delivering pallets, and mom stays home with Bennet who is 2. As a family we like to bike, take walks, and go to Iowa to visit our cousins!

THE TALSMAS

Jeff and Crystal Talsma enrolled their daughter Addie in Pre-K. Jeff makes deliveries for Superior Seafood and Crystal works from home as a mortgage processor. They enjoy playing board games with friends and as a family - even Addie gets in on the games! The Talsmas live on the northeast side of Grand Rapids and are members at First PR Church.



NEW FAMILY WELCOME | THE DUISTERMARS



We are the Duistermars Family: Brad, Dorothy, and our five daughters Caroline, Eleanor, Jane, Margaux and Thea. Two of them are now students at Eastside... Jane is in 5th grade and Margaux is in 2nd grade. Our two oldest daughters are students at Covenant Christian High School... Caroline is in her senior year and Eleanor is a sophomore. Our youngest daughter Thea, who is three, stays home with mom. We live in Walker and Brad works for Foundation Building Materials as a Sales Rep. We enjoy a variety of outside activities, traveling as a family and spending as much time together as possible. We were led to Eastside after visiting (and now joining) First Church and after many told of us of the amazing close-knit school next door. We are so excited to be a part of the Eastside family!!



ANNUAL BIKE HIKE

Debbie Baldwin

Covid changed so many things in 2020, and the annual Fall Bike Hike was no exception. To avoid a long carpool, the 5th-8th grades gathered at close-by Riverside Park and took the Whitepine Trail for a ten-mile bike ride up to the Rockford Dam. After a bit of rest at the dam the group headed back, for a total of 20 miles roundtrip. They ate lunch at Riverside Park (provided once again by Dan and Mary Baldwin!) and then played kickball until it was time to head home for the day.

This year's bike hike marked the 5th trip for 8th-grader Grant Hop. Due to physical limitations from a metabolic disorder, each year he was never able to finish on his bike and for the last miles was given a ride in the Victory Wagon. Some years it was nervous chaperones who cut his bike ride short, despite his personal determination to push through to the end. So there were big smiles all around (and maybe a few teary-eyed moms) when Grant arrived with his dad back to Riverside Park, having completed the entire 20-mile trip on his bike. In his final year at Eastside he had accomplished his long-held goal ... and there were no nervous chaperones to hold him back!

Grant Hop is ready for his fifth and final Bike Hike.

Mr. Carl Veltman has been coming on the Bike Hike for years, and usually volunteers for the job of riding with the fastest group of students.

