

611 VT Route 114 PO, Box 228,
East Burke, VT 05832
ebs2003@msn.com



Phone: 1-802-626-8317
Fax: 1-802-626-8377
eastburkeschool.org

6-1-2020

Dear Current EBS Families, Alumni, Community Partners, and Supporters,

Thank you for adjusting to the challenges brought by the COVID-19 global pandemic, including the social distancing needed to keep your friends and neighbors safe. That distancing has been tough on the EBS community, where we approach learning as a social activity done best in a community. Our students and teachers alike have maintained that what makes our school special is our small, family-like environment, and while we have worked together to make the most of the recent remote learning mandate, we are hopeful that we may return to learning together in person for the 2020-21 academic year.



2019-2020 Course Offerings

Humanities

With the arrival of new humanities teacher Megan Durling in January 2019, East Burke School began offering what we have come to call the Common Course, an all-school Socratic seminar that seeks to build community through shared inquiry across all grade levels. It is a course born of the idea that there are some questions fundamental to the human condition—questions which our students must face if they are to become thoughtful neighbors, global citizens, and lifelong learners.

The thematic focus students chose for the fall semester's Common Course was "Playing God," an examination of the human pursuit of higher knowledge and the consequences of that pursuit. To develop common ground for discussion, students read several of the classic stories that address this theme, including Shelley's *Frankenstein*, The Epic of Gilgamesh, and excerpts from Genesis and Greek mythology. Following these conversations, students then began to explore the work and ethics of real, present-day "Frankensteins," those scientists attempting to defy death through such means as head transplantation, brain death reversal, and whole brain emulation. The course culminated in an analytical essay, for which students received individualized instruction during twice-weekly writing workshops, addressing a question of interest using two of our shared readings. Together, this pairing of daily text-driven seminars alongside weekly writing workshops ensured that every student at EBS had regular opportunities to develop the reading, speaking, listening, and writing skills so crucial for thoughtful engagement with the world.

In addition to teaching the Common Course and Writing, Megan also taught one of the two humanities electives selected by students for this semester: Greek Mythology (the other being Creative Writing with Principal and Humanities Instructor Brandon Mazur). This elective utilized as its anchor text *Mythos* by Stephen Fry, a modern (and more accessible) rendition of the classic tales that have influenced writers and artists for thousands of years. In addition to reading and discussing the stories themselves, students in this course gained historical and linguistic perspective regarding ancient Greece's lasting impact on Western culture: by learning to recognize familiar sounding words from the myths and connect them to their English counterparts, students have begun to see how much of their own language has its roots in ancient Greek ideals. At the end of the semester, students submitted a capstone project of their choice that explored a particular myth of interest in greater depth. For their spring humanities courses, students selected the topics of Athens vs. Sparta, a study of the legacy left by these two ancient rivals, and the history of the Vikings.

Science & Mathematics

EBS students chose Outdoor Survival and The Science of Sci-Fi as their course topics guided by Math and Science Teacher Charlie Delany. Both classes were well received by the students, who took an active role in participating and directing classes. In outdoor survival, students learned the basic needs of the human body and how to satisfy those needs if stranded in the wild. Students especially enjoyed learning about survival shelters and building a full sized Teepee. For this project, students harvested saplings, stripped them of their bark, and made a canvas cover. The students had to learn saw and drawknife safety as well as how to create a pattern on canvas, cut it out, and stitch it together.

In Sci-Fi, students gravitated towards astronomy and cosmology topics (pun intended)! The class began by defining what qualifies as sci-fi and examining a few of the first sci-fi films created, *The Mechanical Butcher* and *A Trip to the Moon*. The course then transitioned to topics of how humans have gained the ability to fly. Students examined different methods of flying and built working models of hot air balloons, airplanes, and rockets. Every Wednesday, students shared current events they found in the news that focused on science and technology. The class had some great discussions around this weekly gathering and students really looked forward to sharing what is new in the world of science. For their spring semester, students chose the topics of geology and limnology, and they participated in a combination of Khan Academy and project-based math activities.



Off-Campus Learning

Throughout the 2019-20 school year, EBS students made hardwood cutting boards and tie dyed T-shirts; went indoor rock climbing and ice-skating; visited the Montshire Museum of Science and Northern Vermont University-Lyndon for a lab experiment and tour; picked, pressed, and sold apple cider at Burke's Fall Foliage Festival; turned wood on a newly-donated lathe; made volcanoes and launched model rockets; participated in East Burke's Halloween Haunted Trail for young trick-or-treaters; cooked meals from different cultures; built bridges from popsicle sticks and hot glue that could hold their body weight; and more!

Building Improvements

2019-20 saw East Burke School undertake major improvements to our building. In the summer, we made an \$11,000 investment in a new furnace to replace the existing unit which had intermittently failed throughout the previous winter. With the award of a Vermont School Safety Grant, we were also able to have all of the doors and locks either re-keyed, repaired, or updated to bring the building into 21st century standards. Furthermore, the staff used our students' absence from the building--a consequence of the COVID-19 global pandemic--to repaint, repair, and reorganize several rooms in the school.

EBS Reconnect Fund

In response to the governor's order to close schools, EBS has been working relentlessly to raise adequate funds to meet our students' and teachers' needs for implementing effective remote learning. As has been the case in so many rural communities, several of our students initially struggled to participate even nominally in distance learning due to lack of internet and computer technology at home. Upon school closure, the staff immediately launched a crowdfunding campaign and raised over \$1,500 in just a few weeks, which allowed us to assist those most in need. We then applied for and received a \$1,000 grant from Green Mountain United Way, helping us reach our end-of-semester goal of \$2,500. To all of you who donated, thank you for making possible our spring semester of online learning!



Now, as we look ahead to the likelihood of future school closures, we plan to address the challenges that persisted throughout our initial attempts to teach and learn remotely. Our first priority is to assist the majority of our students, who have some functioning technology at home but struggle to share their device during the work day with siblings and parents. To ensure that every student can participate fully in remote learning, EBS is preparing to equip each student and staff member with a dedicated school-loaned laptop by the beginning of the fall semester. To do so, we **must raise \$4,500 by August 17.**

By donating to the EBS Reconnect Fund, you will aid in the effort to ensure that every member of our school community has access to a laptop properly equipped for video conferencing and other collaborative online learning opportunities. **Donate today** at www.eastburkeschool.org/giving or stop by **Café Lotti in East Burke** to purchase a **coffee mug or hooded sweatshirt** sporting our school logo. Your contribution will help us remain close-knit from a safe distance. Thank you, as always, for your support!

With gratitude,
Brandon, Charlie, & Megan