

The Emerson School FAQs

Answers to the most frequently asked questions at previous information nights

What are my chances of getting in to Emerson?

In kindergarten we anticipate approximately 20 openings. Openings in grades 1-5 vary from year to year based on attrition. Currently, we know of 1 opening in 1st grade and 1 opening in 4th grade for the 2019-20 school year.

For the 2018-2019 school year, we had 146 applicants for kindergarten, 31 for first grade, and 48 for the remaining grades.

Do you provide services for students with I.E.Ps (Individual Education Plans)?

Special Education services are provided onsite by Portland Public Schools' Special Education Department. As at any District school, the amount of time we have a Special Education teacher on site is dependent solely on how many students we have with IEP's. Most often we qualify for a quarter-time to half-time teacher. This means that most years the district is unable to provide services to students five days per week. It is a top priority at The Emerson School to meet the needs of all learners, including students with IEPs.

How do you ensure that the needs of gifted students are being met?

Instruction at Emerson is differentiated to best meet all students' needs, including those of gifted students. Our blended grade classrooms require that teachers be especially skilled at meeting each student where they are, and requiring growth from that point, whether the student needs a higher level of challenge or a higher level of support. The Project Approach instruction offered at The Emerson School offers opportunities to individualize curriculum for gifted students.

Do the children have recess?

Aside from our daily Morning Movement program (30 minutes of large motor movement activities) all of the students have a mid-day recess. K/1 classes may also have an occasional afternoon recess and other grade levels take Brain Breaks as necessary.

How diverse is the school?

The Emerson School's race, ethnicity, gender, and income demographics fluctuate from year to year due to the impact a random lottery can have on our small size. In the last few years the school has worked especially hard to increase participation in our lottery from families of color and low-income families. Currently, 40% of our students identify as students of color.

Is there a before and after school program?

Yes. Before care is provided by Kids Community Learning Center, or KCLC (located in the Metropolitan Learning Center, MLC, across the street) (www.kidscommunity.org). Aftercare is provided on-site by a separate program called Art4Life (www.art4life.net). If the Art4Life program is full, KCLC is able to manage most overflow. KCLC staff walk students from KCLC to Emerson at the start of the school day, and walk students to KCLC from Emerson at the end of the school day.

Will you be expanding to a K-8 by the time my child gets to sixth grade?

You should not plan that The Emerson School will be a K-8 school. Under our current charter, we have the option to present a middle school plan to the district (which they can choose to reject), but there are many factors to be considered: building capacity, financial viability, curriculum, and program administration are just a few. Expanding through middle school is not a task we are focused on at this time.

After they complete fifth grade, where do Emerson students attend middle school?

There is no one path for middle school after their time at The Emerson School. Some—about half—attend their neighborhood schools, others get in to District focus option schools, and others attend other charter schools or private schools.

Is music taught?

We do not have formal music classes. While we do not have a separate music instructor at Emerson, music is very much part of the fabric of our educational program. Grades K-3 regularly gather for group singing, and most years, we have a 4/5th grade chorus. We come together as a school weekly for our All School Gathering, and have a beloved roster of songs we sing together. Students perform at various functions throughout the year, including our Martin Luther King celebration, Earth Day, and Fifth Grade Promotion. Additionally, classes will attend various musical performances throughout the year, either off-site or by having guest musicians come to our All School Gathering.

Is art taught?

We do have a designated art teacher and a formal art program at The Emerson School. Students receive direct instruction in visual arts for 45 minutes each week. The Emerson School also offers integrated arts education that includes long-term residencies teaching fundamental art skills, attendance at arts performances throughout the city, and school-wide arts events. Additionally, classes also include extra arts instruction as it pertains to their current educational project, and include arts as a fundamental component into the overall curriculum when at all possible.

What kind of child succeeds at The Emerson School?

One of the reasons The Emerson School was founded was to have a school where every child could be successful. Often a program using project learning is restricted to TAG students. Emerson's founders believed that every child would benefit from this approach to learning, not only those who are identified as gifted. Students are encouraged to flip the "How smart am I?" question into "How am I smart?" so they can recognize their own strengths and challenges, as well as those of their classmates, and use that knowledge to enhance their learning.

What holidays do you celebrate?

We do not celebrate traditional secular and religious holidays, though students are welcome to share with their classmates the ways their family celebrates holidays. Instead, the staff selects a number of holidays to celebrate school wide. Our chosen holiday celebrations usually include International Peace Day, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Read Across America Day, and Earth Day. Children's birthdays are recognized differently class by class, so check with individual teachers.

Will your class sizes get any bigger or smaller?

Class size directly impacts the school's economy of scale, since we receive our state funding based solely on the number of students we enroll. We currently have an average class size of 24 students, which sometimes swells if we have had variations in grade progression (if a student is retained in a grade). We don't anticipate changes in class size.

Will my child learn a foreign language at The Emerson School?

We do not offer foreign language instruction. PPS does have a number of excellent language immersion schools; please investigate those options if that is what you are interested in.

How do any budget issues facing PPS impact The Emerson School

Like all public schools, Emerson is challenged by the lack of consistent funding for public schools in Oregon. Because we are a charter school, our students receive about 55% of the total funds that students at neighborhood public schools receive. We do not receive funding from local tax levies or facilities bonds that are passed for schools. What we have working in our favor is that we are financially autonomous from the district, and can choose how and where to apply any funding shortfalls. Our Board of Directors has always been conservative with our budget estimates, and we have found many ways to keep our expenses low and our standards high.

Do your students take the state tests/meet state benchmarks?

Students in grades 3-5 are required to take the Smarter Balanced Assessment in Reading and Math, and, in fifth grade only, the OAKS assessment in Science.

How do the students do on the tests?

Emerson students consistently meet or exceed District and State averages on state assessments.

How do you keep the children safe in your urban neighborhood?

Like at every public school, we watch our neighborhood and front door closely. Our entrance has a camera and is controlled by security codes. Visitors to the school sign in and wear visitor badges. We have not had many causes to use our emergency procedures, but we have them in place and practice them regularly. Police and emergency medical response time is usually two minutes or less.

In terms of building and life safety, we hold monthly fire and emergency drills. We have plans in place should we ever have an earthquake or have to lock down the school, which are also practiced through the year. When students go out on field studies they are taught how to move through the city safely and are chaperoned by teachers and parents.