



## **“Everything You Need to Know” - ERMS Parent Version**

### **Arrival**

The school day begins at 8:00 a.m. in homeroom. However, students should be given enough time to arrive at school, go to their locker, and walk to homeroom by 8:00. *Any student who arrives at school after 8:00 must sign-in at security as a late arrival to school.*

### **Attendance Guidelines**

The state of Connecticut has guidelines which schools must follow regarding student attendance. Absences are categorized as either excused or unexcused according to the guidelines. A student's absence from school is considered unexcused unless they meet one of the following criteria:

- A. the absence meets the definition for an excused absence (including documentation requirements); or
- B. the absence meets the definition of a disciplinary absence.

For absences, there are two levels that pertain to a student. The first nine absences in a school year can be excused by a parent for any reason the parent chooses by contacting the school within 48 hours of the absence. Our expectation is that you will enter the absence in School Dismissal Manager (SDM) or leave a message on the school's attendance line, 203-894-5500 option 1, to report an absence. After 48 hours, a written note from the parent/guardian must be provided. Any absence above the ninth absence is in level 2 (see the chart) and must fall into a particular category with additional documentation in order to be approved. The chart below gives more detailed information regarding the possibilities.

The State Board of Education definitions establish two levels of criteria for an absence to be considered an excused absence (see table below).

Level	Total # of Days Absent*	Acceptable Reasons for a Student Absence to Be Considered Excused	Documentation Required within 10 Days
1	One through nine	Any reason that the student's parent or guardian approves.	Parent or guardian note only.
2	10 and above	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student illness (<i>Note: to be deemed excused, an appropriately licensed medical professional must verify all student illness absences, regardless of the absence's length</i>).</li> <li>• Student's observance of a religious holiday.</li> <li>• Death in the student's family or other emergency beyond the control of the student's family.</li> <li>• Mandated court appearances (additional documentation required).</li> <li>• The lack of transportation that is normally provided by a district other than the one the student attends (parental documentation is not required for this reason).</li> <li>• Extraordinary educational opportunities pre-approved by district administrators. (Opportunities must meet certain criteria. See below for details).</li> </ul>	Parent or guardian note and in some cases additional documentation (see details of specific reason).

\* Note: The total number of days absent includes both excused and unexcused absences.

If student absences are at the level 2 threshold and do not have the appropriate required documentation, they are considered unexcused. There are guidelines that all schools must follow for unexcused absences. Connecticut state law reads: “**Sec. 10-198a. Policies and procedures concerning truants.** (a) For purposes of this section, "truant" means a child age five to eighteen, inclusive, who is enrolled in a public or private school and has ***four unexcused absences from school in any one month or ten unexcused absences from school in any school year.***”

Effective July 1, 2021, as per Public Act 21-46, all students are allowed two Mental Health Wellness (MHW) Days in a school year. Similar to absences one through nine, parents/guardians will need to notify their child's school that their child will be utilizing one of these MHW days and are not required to provide any additional documentation. Please note that MHW can not be taken on consecutive school days.

## Backpacks

Students will be using backpacks to carry their books/materials from class to class throughout the day. They will NOT be allowed to go to their lockers in between classes or during instructional time. At the start of each year, students are issued a personal locker with its own unique combination. **Students can only access their locker three times a day, upon arrival at school, on their way to lunch, and at the end of the day at dismissal.**

## Bicycles

Students are allowed to ride their bicycles to school. If they do ride one, please remind them that they need to park and secure it properly in one of the bike racks in front of the building. They can lock and chain it to a rack. The school is not responsible for stolen or damaged bicycles.

## **Bus Notes**

Parent permission is required in order for your child to ride a different bus or their regular bus but stop at a different stop. You must enter this in SDM as an exception. **No bus notes will be accepted over the phone or via email.**

## **Cell Phones**

In an effort to support our students being present and engaged during the school day, we have created formal cell phone expectations. The use of cell phones is not permitted for students at any time during the school day. They are to remain in their backpacks, turned off, for the duration of the day. The only exception is if a teacher specifically requests their use (in which case, the teacher will facilitate the obtaining and returning of phones).

If a student is found to violate this rule and uses their cell phone, the following procedure will be implemented. At the teacher's discretion, they can give a warning to have a child put their cell phone away prior to it becoming a 1st offense. For a 1st offense, the teachers will confiscate the cell phone, will turn it into the office, home will be contacted, and parents will need to pick up their child's cell phone. In subsequent offenses parents will still need to pick up their child's cell phone and disciplinary consequences may be given ranging from lunch detentions to ISS.

We ask for your support in this expectation by recognizing that students will not be able to answer your calls or texts during the school day. If there is an emergency that requires immediate attention, you can call the main office and they can reach the student. However, please keep in mind that forgetting papers, changes in pick-up plans, and other situations are not "emergencies" - students will have time to check their phones for updates as soon as the day is over.

## **Counseling Center - [Counseling Center Website](#)**

You never have to feel alone at East Ridge Middle School. In addition to teachers and administrators to help you, you also have a Counselor to support you. You will have the same Counselor for three years, and she will always be available to answer your questions, help you with academic and personal problems, and just be around if you need to talk.

The Counseling Center is next to the main office. It's easy to make an appointment with your counselor. All you need to do is drop by the Center between periods and the secretary will help you set up a meeting with your counselor. Students who need to see their Counselor during the school day must get a pass from the teacher whose class they are missing. Your parents are also welcome to call the Counseling Center with their concerns or questions.

Don't wait for your counselor to call you. Come whenever you need to talk to somebody. They are there for you. The ERMS counselors are:

Grade 6 - Ms. Caitlin deMello

Grade 7 - Mrs. Amy Jonsson

Grade 8 - Ms. Meghan Mulvehill

Other mental health/counseling support available include:

Sarah Fritz - School Psychologist

Dana Tatela - School Psychologist

Audrey Camino-jara - Teen Talk Counselor, [Kids in Crisis](#)

## **Chromebooks**

All students at East Ridge Middle School are provided with a Chromebook at the beginning of the school year. Students use these Chromebooks actively for everything from classwork and technological exploration, to homework and projects. As parents, we request that you help us ensure that your students are using their Chromebooks appropriately, and treating them with care and respect.

There are clear expectations in school about what Chromebooks should and should not be used for. We ask that you help reinforce these rules at home, especially in instances where it has been a problem during the school day. Students are expected to bring their Chromebooks to school and back home on a daily basis. It is a student's responsibility to charge their Chromebook with their school-provided charger every night. If they do not charge them, or forget to bring them, they will face difficulty participating fully in school the next day, and will risk falling behind.

Please also make sure your student respects their Chromebook as if it was their own computer. They should not damage or drop it, put stickers on it, write on it, download anything inappropriate on it, or do anything else that could harm it. Damage to Chromebooks may result in a fine if the Chromebook needs to be majorly repaired or replaced.

## **Dress Guidelines**

Any clothing students wear to school that breaks one of the following rules is prohibited:

- 1) Students' clothes should not impair safety or increase risks of danger or injury to themselves or other students.
- 2) Students' clothes should not cause distraction from the learning environment.
- 3) Students' clothes should not show any inappropriate messages or images.

## **Drugs and Vaping**

East Ridge is proud to be a drug free zone. Due to this, drugs of any kind, such as vaporizers, chewing tobacco, e-cigarettes, alcohol, or any other tobacco/nicotine delivery device, are not permitted at any time on campus, on any school transportation vehicle, or at any off-campus school activity. These drugs and devices pose a hazard to health by both use and subsequent disposal. Students found with any of these drugs or devices are subject to disciplinary action as smokers.

### **Early Dismissal**

In order for a child to be dismissed early from school, you must enter this in SDM as an exception. **No early dismissals will be accepted over the phone or via email.**

### **Extra Help**

At times you may find that your child needs a bit more help in understanding the material that has been taught in class. ERMS teachers are free to give extra help on a more individualized basis. Your child must make an appointment with the teacher personally to make the necessary arrangements to meet either before, during, or after school to get extra help.

### **Food**

No outside food is to be delivered to school for students unless for a planned event.

### **Gum**

Students are not permitted to chew gum during school. Chewing gum is a distraction in the classroom and leads to a great amount of extra cleanup for the custodial staff.

### **Items Left at Home**

If your child forgets something at home such as their lunch or a book, you may drop it off down at Security by the main entrance for the student to pick up during their lunch period or during passing time.

### **Lockers**

At the start of each year, students are issued a personal locker with its own unique combination. **Students can only access their locker three times a day, upon arrival at school, on their way to lunch, and at the end of the day at dismissal.** They are told to not share their combination with anyone, and to ensure their locker is closed and locked whenever they aren't using it. Students should keep their lockers clean and orderly, and should not place decals or stickers on them or write on them. A student's locker is school property - school administrators may open a locker at any time with "reasonable cause" if they believe that the locker contains items which are prohibited by school rules or state laws.

### **Lost and Found**

Lost and found departments can be found by security, both locker rooms in the gym, and occasionally the Main Office for smaller items. If your child loses an object, they must report it at once to the secretary in the Main Office and look through the previously specified departments either during their lunch or at the end of the school day. Please do not have your child bring valuables or large sums of money to school where they may be lost. We do everything we can to safeguard private property, but the school cannot be responsible for lost items. Please remind

your child not to give out their locker combination to others so it remains a safe place for your child to store their property.

### **Lunches (and breakfast)**

School lunches, which include milk, are free of charge. A la carte items such as water, juice, snacks, are extra. On early dismissal days, lunch is not served. Breakfast is available on early dismissal days free of charge. The daily lunch menu can be found on the ERMS website in the parent link under food services information.

### **Obligation**

Students are expected to take care of the school's books, technology, materials, and property. Returning items on time and in good condition is very important. Students will be expected to replace any lost or damaged school equipment.

### **Passes**

We use various forms of hall passes to keep track of where students are and where they are going during the day. If they will be arriving in a class late, they are expected to have a "late pass" from another teacher/staff member to explain their tardiness. If they are stepping out of a classroom for a moment, or going to a different location during class, they will need hall passes.

### **School Dismissal Manager (SDM)**

Using SDM with your smartphone or computer, you can quickly report when your child will be **absent, tardy, leaving early coming back, leaving early not coming back, or riding a bus to a friend's house** (no more notes or phone calls required).

**Please make every effort to communicate your child's plan with them before they leave for school.** If you make a change in SDM after your child has left for school and they are unaware of the plan, please call the main office for assistance.

Upon initial login for the school year, your child's default will be their assigned bus. **If you normally pick them up after school or they walk home, please click "Update Main Default" and choose the correct default ("Pickup" or "Walker").** If there are times when your child's dismissal plan (at 2:50) differs from the default, you do NOT need to report it. At the middle school level, we begin to set the path to independence and personal responsibility. Students are expected to know and follow their after school plan. This can include taking the bus, walking, staying at school for a club or extra help, or being picked up by a parent. Please communicate directly with your child. At the middle school level the only time you need to put an exception in SDM is if you are picking your child up early, or if they will be absent, tardy or riding a bus to a friend's house.

Please report absences and tardies before 9:00a.m. When your student is tardy (which is any time after 8:00 a.m.), he/she will sign in at the security desk before reporting to class.

We strongly suggest planning ahead to create any dismissal exception in SDM before 9:00a.m. as well. However, please note that the cut-off time for same day entries is 1:30p.m. on regular days and 9:45a.m. on early release days. Calls are discouraged after cut-off times unless it is an emergency. We truly appreciate your cooperation with these expectations.

### **Academic Integrity**

Cheating is either giving or receiving unauthorized assistance on any type of school related work. In specific classroom or homework situations, individual teachers will determine what is or is not authorized as legitimate assistance.

Plagiarism is against the law. Plagiarism consists of copying or paraphrasing the words or ideas of others without proper formal acknowledgement. No student may legitimately submit work as his or her own if it is the work of another or other persons. To help combat plagiarism, teachers may utilize turnitin.com to check on originality in assignments. Parents are encouraged to join us in supporting students to develop paraphrasing skills.

Our response to cheating and plagiarism is tiered with our priority being to support students in learning and growing from their experiences. However, depending on the circumstance, the severity, and the frequency, teachers can use their discretion. They can either approach it as a learning opportunity, grant a re-do or an alternative assignment, deduct points or award a zero, and/ or refer it to administration. In all cases, parents will be contacted.

### **Culture and Climate Programs**

We prioritize facilitating an inclusive school community where all students and staff feel valued, respected, connected, and supported. We have four programs we implement that compliment one another to achieve this goal. Classroom teachers, administrators, and other staff members integrate these principles into every facet of our school community. It is our expectation that students aspire to do the same. These programs are used to help students learn and grow into well-rounded young people. At a very basic level, it is treating each other with kindness and respect so that everyone feels like they have a place they belong. The four programs used are:

#### *1) PBIS - Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports*

The PBIS philosophy is that when students are taught to effectively use relevant expected social

skills for themselves, and with others, school climates are described as more positive, learning environments are designated as safer, and student-educator relationships are referred to as more trusting and respectful. PBIS establishes a positive climate in which appropriate behavior is the norm.

We have Tiger **PRIDE** at ERMS! Our positive behavioral expectations are shared in our **PRIDE** matrix. **Personal Responsibility** - to be accountable for actions, choices and their results.

**Respect** - to show consideration, appreciation and acceptance. **Integrity** - to be honest, sincere, and kind in words and actions. **Determination** - to set goals and persevere through challenges.

**Excellence** - to strive to do your best at all times.

## *2) Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence: RULER*

We utilize the RULER approach to (1) increase the emotional intelligence of students, faculty, and the larger Ridgefield community and (2) to apply Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports in our school. RULER is an acronym that stands for the five skills of emotional intelligence: recognizing, understanding, labeling, expressing and regulating emotions. RULER is an evidence-based approach for integrating social and emotional learning into schools, developed at the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence.

## *3) No Place for Hate (NPFH)*

NPFH is a program sponsored by the Anti-Defamation League and is designed to empower students to make their school a safe and inclusive space where all students feel valued, respected, and have a sense of belonging. Students participate in various activities that are designed to address instances of bias, prejudice, bullying, mean spirited behavior etc. with the goal of supporting students in developing realistic action steps and the tools necessary to create a positive outcome for their school community.

Students can also be involved by becoming a NPFH Student Ambassador where they will help design the activities and participate in leadership training at the beginning of the year.

Parents/Guardians can join the parent committee. Please reach out to Marie Delio, [mdelio@ridgefieldps.net](mailto:mdelio@ridgefieldps.net) if you are interested in joining.

## *4) Advisory Program*

All students take part in an advisory group led by a faculty member. The groups are small and, when possible, students remain in the same group for their entire middle school career. The goal of this program is to promote students' social-emotional and academic well-being and encourage



students to form relationships and to be responsible members of the community. Advisory groups meet throughout the year to review and discuss important topics pertaining to the school, specific grade level, or individual growth. Topics include information about new procedures, handling stress, organization, and grade level related topics such as transition to high school. There will also be opportunities throughout the year to participate in advisory activity blocks where students choose an activity such as ping pong, making friendship bracelets, board games, drawing, etc.