

# MERSD Elementary School Education Program

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The Manchester Essex Regional School District is consistently and proudly among the highest-performing districts in the state. MERSD is an inclusive school district; as such, we are a collaborative culture that welcomes all members into our learning community. Recognizing that students share more similarities than differences, our learning community respects each individual's unique contributions. It is expected that all adults share the responsibility for providing every student with access to and participation in high quality education.

MERSD proudly works to educate each child from his/her own readiness level to facilitate the intellectual, social and emotional growth process. There are many measures of success, and we are committed to helping each individual child achieve his/her potential. In addition to a robust core curriculum that balances high expectations for student achievement with the needs of the whole child, we offer specialty programming and a variety of 21st century learning opportunities, such as: elementary world language\*; Integrated Pre-Kindergarten; specialized learning programs for students with dyslexia, autism spectrum disorders, and developmental delays; STEM coursework in coding, engineering, project based environmental studies, FIRST Robotics, Project Adventure; award winning arts and music programs; and, state champion athletic teams.



*MERSD, with the partnership and support of member communities, will provide educational opportunities and resources so that all students can realize their individual, unique, and highest potential, achieve academic excellence, value integrity and honesty, and become intellectually curious and critical thinkers.*



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## Curriculum Delivery Methods and Practice

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The Manchester Essex Elementary Schools employ a broad- range of teaching methodologies that strive to balance the best of progressive methodology with tried-and-true traditional approaches. Our curriculum and instructional program are designed to support our mission, vision, and core values.

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### **Student Centered**

We believe schools must establish a safe environment that supports the development of all students. Schools must engage all aspects of a child's development, including knowledge, a sense of self, emotional well-being, physical health, and skills and strategies to negotiate an ever-changing and unpredictable world.

### **Student Achievement**

We believe MERSD should foster a learning environment that encourages academic achievement, social and emotional freedom and engagement, collaboration and creative problem-solving; the skills to confront new ideas with both rigor and sensitivity, and the awareness to and ability to extend the skills beyond the academic core to include experiential learning, the arts, cultural awareness, and physical and social emotional health.

### **Equity**

We believe our schools must strive to create a just and equitable environment that respects individual differences and the diversity of our communities, country, and world.

### **Family & Community Partnerships**

Schools are a reflection of their communities. We believe that providing a quality education that prepares our students for an unpredictable world is a shared responsibility, fostered by partnerships among the schools, families, educational non-profits, businesses and the community-at-large.

### **Resources**

We believe the District and our community partners should collaborate to provide the necessary funding to equip our students with the essential critical thinking, analytic, communication, and problem-solving skills they need to be productive, contributing members of our local and global communities and deliver on the promise of our students' potential.

To that end we provide a rigorous core curriculum that is complemented by a rich program of experiential and exploratory learning experience designed to utilize an interdisciplinary approach that creates connections between learning and the real world. It is our intent that through this process we can create deeper more meaningful learning as well as expose students to a broad range of experiences



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that may help them to identify areas of interest or strength and form the foundations for the development of individual pathways to success.

MERSD elementary level curriculum and instruction is delivered in a single classroom model with the elementary classroom teacher responsible for the delivery of all core content instruction. All classroom lessons are differentiated based on formative assessment data and whole group, small group, and individual work is integrated into lessons with an increasing number of lessons relying on anywhere, anytime access to technology. In addition to general differentiated instruction, students receive a variety of support services that are provided through inclusion and push-in services whenever possible.

## Academic Program Description

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### Core Academic Program

#### **English Language Arts/Literacy**

MERSD implements evidence- and researched-based Literacy programming that is grounded in the science of reading and proven instructional practices. The MERSD Literacy Program is student centered, our students are empowered to take an active role in their learning. Using both print and digital resources to build strong literacy foundations, students access complex text and varied writing opportunities. Through exposure to rich text and rigorous instruction, students learn to explore the world and express themselves through reading, writing, and speaking. Understanding that the path to success is not the same for every student, we provide multi-tiered systems of support and data-driven differentiated instruction to teach, reteach, or extend, to meet the needs of all learners. The district adopted *Wonders 2020* as the core literacy resource. *Wonders 2020* is DESE approved literacy program and has the highest EdReports rating for alignment to evidence-based instructional literacy practices.

#### **Mathematics**

MERSD implements *Everyday Mathematics* which supports hands-on inquiry-based mathematics instruction. The program requires manipulatives to support conceptual understanding and development of math practices. It is our goal for students to become confident problem-solvers who value and enjoy math. Implementation utilizes instructional technology and flexible teaching space for whole group instruction along with spaces for multiple small breakout groups. Through problem solving our students learn how to apply math thinking in real life scenarios.

#### **Science**

Science curriculum is delivered using *Mystery Science* for grades K-2 and the *Know Atom* program for grades 3-5. *Mystery Science* capitalizes on children's natural curiosity. The program promotes critical thinking, exploration of the world, and provides opportunities to develop their ability to problem solve.

The *Know Atom* Program is engineered to connect students to the many areas that science reached through a hands-on experiential approach. Students relate concepts through the Scientific Method by generating data in experiments and testing prototypes built using the



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Engineering Design Process. This includes a great number of materials and hands-on experiences, including projects that students develop and add to over time. Also, as part of the science program, MERSD is committed to environmental awareness, stewardship, and sustainability. To that end we have instituted a K-12 learning strand dedicated to instruction and promotion of environment education. Our program begins with hands-on experiential learning at the elementary level and culminates in a project based high school pathway that leads to “green” diploma recognition.

## **Social Studies**

Aligned with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education Social Science Frameworks, the goal of the social studies program is to prepare students to become responsible citizens of the world by helping them to understand and appreciate the diversity and commonality of all people. Content highlights for the K-5 continuum include the following:

- Kindergarten: Many Roles in Living, Learning, and Working
- Grade 1: Leadership, Cooperation, Unity, and Diversity
- Grade 2: Global Geography: Places and Peoples, Cultures and Resources
- Grade 3: Massachusetts, Home to Many Different People
- Grade 4: North American Geography and Peoples
- Grade 5: United States History to the Civil War and the Modern Civil Rights Movement

Project-based learning experiences that are developmentally appropriate and of high interest to students help to develop a deeper appreciation of the complexities of history, cultures, and societies. The study of Social Science provides opportunities for interdisciplinary learning experiences.

## **MTSS – Multi-Tiered Systems of Support**

**Vision for MERSD Tiered Systems of Support:** The District will ensure high quality tiered instruction across academic, behavioral, and social emotional domains and provide an inclusive environment that utilizes the concepts of Universal Design for Learning to foster equitable access for all students.

**Definition of Tiered Systems of Support:** MTSS is a multi-tiered system of support that offers a comprehensive continuum of systematic, evidence-based practices to ensure a proactive response to students’ needs. Data collection and progress monitoring are integral in guiding decision making. Students move fluidly through Tier 1, 2, 3 supports based on progress monitoring data. Staff is allocated annually and throughout the year based on student need.



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## **Social-Emotional Learning**

MERSD is committed to establishing a safe environment that supports the development of all students. Schools must engage all aspects of a child's development, including knowledge, a sense of self, emotional well-being, physical health, and skills and strategies to negotiate an ever-changing and unpredictable world. The elementary schools utilize several tools in support of this core value.

### **RULER**

*RULER*, an acronym for the five skills of emotional intelligence (*recognizing, understanding, labeling, expressing, and regulating*) is the evidence-based approach to social and emotional learning developed at our Center. Evaluation research shows that *RULER* fosters a range of behaviors and shifts in school climate that are essential to positive youth development.

Research on the impact of *RULER* also informs educational practice and policy by demonstrating that emotional intelligence can improve leader, educator, and student outcomes in schools serving pre-K-12 students. -[ycei.org](http://ycei.org)

"Emotional intelligence is the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and action." -Salovey & Mayer, 1990

### **Responsive Classroom**

The *Responsive Classroom* approach to teaching is comprised of a set of well-designed practices intended to create safe, joyful, and engaging classrooms and school communities. The emphasis is on helping students develop their academic, social, and emotional skills in a learning environment that is developmentally responsive to their strengths and needs.

-[responsiveclassroom.org](http://responsiveclassroom.org)

### **Second Step**

*Second Step* programs combine discussions with fun activities and family resources. The programs help children learn social-emotional skills such as responsible decision-making, working together to solve problems, managing strong emotions, and getting along with others. MERSD utilizes *Second Step* to teach student anti-bullying skills and strategies to expand their social emotional capacity in this area. These skills can help children succeed academically and socially. -[secondstep.org](http://secondstep.org)

### **Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Cultural responsiveness is an approach to viewing students' culture and identity (including race, ethnicity, multilingualism, and other characteristics) as assets, and creating learning experiences and environments that value and empower them. As conceived by leading scholar Gloria Ladson-Billings and informed by an evolving body of research, culturally responsive teaching and learning promotes three outcomes supporting student learning:

- **Academic achievement:** Educators hold high, transparent expectations for all students, and support the development of students' academic skills and identities as learners.



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- **Cultural competence:** Educators understand culture's role in education, their students' cultures, and their own identity and biases to 1) affirm students' backgrounds and identities and 2) foster their ability to understand and honor others' cultures.
- **Sociopolitical awareness:** Educators and students partner to identify, analyze, and work to solve systemic inequities in their communities and the world. – Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Cultural Competence: Five components of Cultural Competence: Awareness, Attitude, Knowledge, Skills, and Practices. MERSD supports educators in becoming more aware, intentional, and purposeful as they engage the school community. Developing a greater awareness of their own cultural beliefs, behaviors, and those of their colleagues and a greater appreciation for and commitment to their responsibilities as leaders in shaping an inclusive learning community for students and adults alike.

## **Exploratory & Experiential Learning**

### **STEM - Science Technology Engineering & Math**

- **Math** – Our current Math Explorers and Problem Solvers Program, designed to help students realize their mathematical potential through real-world mathematical problem solving and collaboration, would be enriched in this context. “There are essential elements of educating young people to become innovators: the value of hands-on projects where students have to solve a real-world problem and demonstrate mastery; the importance of learning to draw on academic content from multiple disciplines to solve a problem; learning to work in teams” (Wagner, 2012). Projects ranging from a few weeks to a month or more with a variety of complexity support student inquiry.
- **Environmental Science** - Through our outdoor gardens, greenhouses, and outdoor classroom, the MERSD learning community engages in collaborative hands-on activities that are designed to promote environmental awareness. MERSD Elementary Green Team provides students with an opportunity to take a proactive role in creating sustainability practices within their school environment.
- **Digital Literacy Technology & Computer Science** - MERSD strives to provide foundational digital information literacy skills that will allow students to easily adapt to an ever-changing world. Currently, MERSD provides integrated Technology and Library programs. The curriculum will provide students with hands-on experience with multiple technology platforms and tools while at the same time instilling a love of reading and appreciation of traditional print media found in traditional library programs. Utilizing 21st century skills to promote learning via information and technology, the goal of our program is to help our students become critical thinkers, effective problem solvers and creative collaborators.



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## **Physical Education Program**

In keeping with our efforts to address the needs of the whole child, physical education is delivered in a wellness model. Students participate in PE twice weekly, and the curriculum is designed to promote wellness, nutrition, and life-long exercise habits. To meet the needs of a variety of learners, curriculum focuses on personal skill development in terms of refining fundamental movement patterns associated with a variety of small games, modified sports, dance and rhythm, and gymnastics. The curriculum focuses on individual skill refinement through an increased amount of practice time in more complex game and sport situations.

Students also participate in Project Adventure, which is a K-12 learning strand that promotes key social emotional skills such as cooperation, trust, communication, conflict resolution, teamwork, safety, respect, caring and consideration, self-esteem, leadership, creativity, risk-taking, goal setting, and the ability to “think out of the box”.

## **Library**

The MERSD Elementary School Library Program is designed to support the school community’s academic and personal educational needs and interests. The school library is a learner-laboratory that supports, extends, and differentiates MERSD curriculum with the district-wide goal of developing future ready graduates. The school library serves as an information hub in our elementary schools. Collaboration with all disciplines and full integration of technology is an integral part of the model.

- **Collection Development:** Library materials support and extend the core curriculum; serve the needs and interest of students and staff; stimulate intellectual curiosity; and nurture a love of reading.
- **Research Skills:** Developmentally appropriate, inquiry-based projects move students from guided practice to development of more independent information literacy skills including exploration of resources and ethical use of information.
- **Organizing Information:** Pragmatic library instruction fosters the ability to identify, appreciate and pursue materials based on an understanding of the library’s layout and organization tenets both physical and philosophical.
- **Cultural Proficiency:** Diverse cultures, social awareness, global experiences, and points of view are introduced and represented via collection development practices, library lessons, storytelling and discussion. Social context and self-awareness are identified as key components of “cultural intelligence.”

## **The Arts**

The MERSD Elementary Arts Program is grounded in 4 principles; through practices related to creating, presenting or performing, responding, and connecting, students learn the role of visual arts in their individual lives and interests.

## **Visual Arts Program**

In the visual arts program students are encouraged to express creative ideas with skill and confidence using the principals of the arts.



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- Creating: by generating and conceptualizing artistic ideas and work, organizing and developing artistic ideas and work, and refining and completing artistic work.
- Presenting: through selecting, analyzing and interpreting artistic work for presentation, developing and refining artistic techniques and work for presentation, and conveying meaning through the presentation of artistic work.
- Responding: by analyzing artistic work, interpreting intent and meaning in artistic work and applying criteria to evaluate artistic work.
- Connecting: by synthesizing and relating knowledge and personal experiences to make art, and relating artistic ideas and works to societal, cultural and historical contexts to deepen understanding.

Each of these principles are taught at developmentally appropriate levels using a variety of mediums including but not limited to pottery (kiln), paint, ink, clay, and recycled art.

## **General Music**

General Music, Instrumental Music, Drama, and Chorus are all offerings that our students engage in throughout the school year. Students receive 45 minutes of instruction in general music weekly and instrumental lessons are provided in a pull-out model throughout the day along with before/after-school band, chorus, and musical practices. The goal of the music program is to prepare children to become musical in three ways: “Tuneful, Beatful, and Artful.” Our students experience music through singing, listening, playing instruments, dancing, moving, responding, improvising, communicating, reading, and performing at levels which are age and grade appropriate. Our music education program is rooted in Dr. Howard Gardner’s theory of Multiple Intelligences which provides many pathways to learning.

There are multiple school based and district wide performances throughout the school year.

## **\*World Languages [*Not offered 2022-2023 School Year*]**

The World Language program provides an opportunity for students to acquire proficiency in Spanish and in French as well as to explore the cultures where those languages are spoken. The program strives to develop student proficiency in the four skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking in the target language with special emphasis on communication.

## **Play**

MERSD is committed to play as component of the overall educational program. Through our commitment to balancing whole child needs and strong achievement, we are engaged in a variety of activities to promote the social emotional health of our students. “Recess promotes social and emotional learning and development for children by offering them a time to engage in peer interactions in which they practice and role play essential social skills. This type of activity, under adult supervision, extends teaching in the classroom to augment the school’s social climate.

Through play at recess, children learn valuable communication skills, including negotiation, cooperation, sharing, and problem solving as well as coping skills, such as perseverance and self-control. These skills become fundamental, lifelong personal tools. Recess offers a child a necessary, socially structured means for managing stress. By adapting and adjusting to the





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complex school environment, children augment and extend their cognitive development in the classroom.” (American Academy of Pediatrics).

MERSD offers students multiple periods for recess throughout the day. There is a 15-minute recess before school along with a recess period at lunchtime. Some grades also have an additional recess throughout the week.

## **Special Education – Support Services**

### **Inclusion**

The elementary special education program serves students with a range of needs the majority of whom qualify as moderate special needs students and access a combination of inclusion and pull-out services. The moderate special needs program includes inclusion supports for students as well as separate instruction for reading, written language, and math. Moderate special education teachers deliver services in spacious classrooms that include technology supports and flexible seating configurations.

As of 2022-2023, the moderate needs staff includes special education teachers who deliver inclusion and pull-out services as well as teaching assistants. Separate spaces are utilized for the teachers to deliver instruction in quiet locations. Pull out spaces are located near classroom neighborhoods.

### **Specialized Programs**

- **ACE:** The Academic and Communication (ACE) program provides specially designed, thematically based, and substantially separate academic instruction for students who struggle with the pace, volume, and complexity of the grade level curriculum due to lower receptive language, reduced working memory, and specific learning disabilities. Instruction parallels academic content in mainstream grade level classrooms, and prioritizes development of reading, writing, and oral communication skills. Assistive technology designed to support reading and written language development is integrated throughout the program.
- **IRWL:** The Intensive Reading and Written Language (IRWL) program provides elementary students who have diagnosed reading disabilities with specialized instruction in Language Arts, Reading, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. Instruction is thematically based and parallels content in the mainstream grade level classrooms. The Intensive Reading and Written Language Program incorporates daily reading tutorials tailored to individual student needs. Instructional technology designed to support reading and written language development is integrated throughout the program. A general education teacher in each grade collaborates with the IRWL program in supporting students in sustaining connections with peers through grade level and co-curricular activities.
- **SAIL:** The SAIL Program provides a comprehensive social and behavioral support model for students who require specialized assistance and ongoing case management. Program staffing consists of an interdisciplinary team that includes a certified special education teacher(s), teaching assistants, occupational therapist, speech and language pathologist, and school counselor. Students accessing the SAIL Program participate in inclusion classes throughout



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the school day in addition to therapies, social skills groups, executive functioning, academic support, and specialized case management. In addition, students often receive additional supervision and support during unstructured times when social challenges are greatest, including lunch, recess, and transition times. Families and students are provided with wrap around communication.

- **SWING:** SWING program serves students with complex disabilities, including global developmental and cognitive delays, neurological disabilities, autism, and intellectual impairments who require support with academic, social, and adaptive skills. Staffing consists of an interdisciplinary team that includes a certified special education teacher, psychologist, teaching assistants, occupational therapist, and speech and language pathologist. Students participate in small group classes that incorporate a clear, sequential, and multi-sensory approach to instruction, including ongoing use of visual reinforcements and opportunities for kinesthetic learning. The SWING program offers individual tutorials in addition to therapies, social skills or counseling groups as needed, as well as specialized case management. Services are individualized according to student needs.

## **Kindergarten & Pre-Kindergarten**

### **Kindergarten**

The MERSD Kindergarten program is a full-day, non-tuition program. Space for cooperative learning is required along with a great deal of storage space for materials. Kindergarten classrooms currently have their own child-sized bathrooms and it is requested that this be included in the new building.

### **Pre-Kindergarten**

The MERSD currently offers a district-wide integrated preschool program housed at Memorial School in Manchester. The preschool typically serves a total of 20-30 students through a two-day program for three year olds and a three-day program for four year olds. The student cohort comprises tuition paying peer pals and students with disabilities. The program runs from 8:30am-12:30pm.

The preschool curriculum is delivered in whole group and center based learning (6 centers), including play centers with a mid-room divider, a low sink designed for children's access, lunch/snack area, cubbies for student clothing and lunchboxes, and an outdoor playground. The current location has abundant natural lighting. The preschool is outfitted with sound panels and an amplification system for students with hearing impairments. There is a student bathroom with low toilets and room for portable potty seats. A storage space with a window is used for multiple purposes, including small group and individual speech and language therapy. This space is alternately used for changing students who wear diapers.

Students in the preschool receive speech and language, occupational therapy, and physical therapy services. These services are delivered in whole class, small group, and individual sessions. For other individual therapies, students receive services in a separate space within the room or transition to another location.



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## Organization of the School

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### Administrative

The school is led by a single administrator (Principal) and is supported by an administrative assistant, a school psychologist, a special education team chairperson, a school adjustment counselor, and a school nurse. Students and teachers are clustered into grade-level cohorts.

### Counseling & Support Services

MERSD provides support to students in the form of individual and group counseling, screenings, parent and teacher consultation, and crisis intervention.

### Health Services

The overarching framework for any school health program is illustrated in the MA DPH School Health Manual and provides the roadmap for districts to follow in meeting its obligations to provide health education and services to its students; as with all roadmaps, there are different paths available to achieve objectives. The goal of health services is to provide, appraise, protect, and promote student health, facilitate attendance, ensure access and referral to community primary care providers and other youth-serving agencies, foster use of primary care services, prevent and control disease and other health problems, and provide emergency care and educational and counseling opportunities.

### Organization of the Day

MERSD adheres the philosophy that small class size supports our goal of student centered, hands-on differentiated instruction. As such, the MERSD School Committee has established class size benchmarks that serve as the first building block of the scheduling process.

| Grade | Class Size Benchmark |
|-------|----------------------|
| K     | 17-19                |
| 1     | 17-19                |
| 2     | 18-20                |
| 3     | 18-20                |
| 4     | 19-22                |
| 5     | 19-22                |



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## MERSD Elementary Time on Learning

| MERSD<br>K-5 Time on Learning<br>2022-2023    |                                       |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| Grade K-5                                     |                                       |
| 8:30 AM – 2:45 PM<br><i>Instructional Day</i> | 6 hours 15 minutes, or<br>375 minutes |
| Morning Meeting                               | 5x15                                  |
| Literacy                                      | 5x90, 4x25                            |
| Movement Break/Snack                          | 5x15                                  |
| Math  | 5x75                                  |
| Lunch/Recess                                  | 5x45                                  |
| Science/Social Studies                        | 5x45                                  |
| Specialist Classes                            | 6x45                                  |
| Social-Emotional Learning                     | 4x20                                  |

Each class in grades K-5 has the following specialist classes scheduled each week:

| Class                      | Meeting Frequency | Current Location      |
|----------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|
| Wellness                   | Twice Weekly      | Gym                   |
| Visual Arts                | Once Weekly       | Art Room              |
| Music                      | Once Weekly       | Music Room            |
| Foreign Language           | Once Weekly       | Grade Level Classroom |
| Library/Research           | Once Weekly       | Library               |
| Technology/Engineering     | Once Weekly       | Tech Lab              |
| Instrumental Music Lessons | Individual        | Music Room / Stage    |

