

August 16, 2010

Dear Parents and Guardians,

*Well, it appears that summer has finally arrived after a long period of rainy, dreary weather. So it may be difficult for us to begin to think about returning to school, but we must!*

That was how our summer letter began last year, hard to believe what a difference a year makes!

It is that time of year again, and we have many changes happening at the middle school. We are sad *and* happy to report to you that Lila Mitchell has accepted a position at the Burns School in Saco. Lila will be their new Assistant Principal. We wish her luck and thank her for all of the many wonderful things she has done for our students over her many years of service in Gorham.

Last spring we said good-bye to Claire McCullough after 40 years of service to the students of Gorham and also to John Wilkinson after 26 years of service. Alyssa Hart, who worked as our Behavior Supports Program teacher resigned over the summer months.

We are very excited about our new teachers and look forward to having them join our team after approval from the School Committee.

In years past we have included all sorts of forms that you are required to fill out and return to the school. This year we will hand those forms out to the students on the opening day of school and ask that you have your child return them to their homeroom teacher by the end of the first week of school. Many of these forms are required in order for your child to participate in some activities or to use any of the technology offered at GMS. The Free and Reduced Lunch forms are critical, whether you qualify or not, as they are used to determine federal grant eligibility. Please sign them and return them to the school so that we can potentially qualify for grant money.

**As we did last year, we are reserving the first day of school for our 6<sup>th</sup> graders. We know it can be quite intimidating to be in school with all of the “big kids”, so they will be the only students on campus that day and we will have activities in place to help familiarize them with our building and the way we do things here at GMS. Their first day will be August 30<sup>th</sup>, with the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders getting to sleep one extra day, as they will begin classes on Tuesday, August 31<sup>st</sup>.**

The first date to remember for our 6<sup>th</sup> grade parents will be the evening of August 30<sup>th</sup>. We will hold an Open House for you that evening and you will have a chance to meet all

of your child's teachers and get a tour of our building directed by your child. The evening will begin at 6:00 pm and run until 7:30 pm. We will have lots of information to hand out about clubs and activities for your child as well as something sweet to eat!

Our Open House for 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> Grade parents will be Wednesday, September 8<sup>th</sup> from 6:00 until 7:30 pm. Again, we will have lots of information about activities here at GMS plus some sweets to eat. We will also be signing up parents to volunteer for many of the activities that will happen during the year. For 8<sup>th</sup> Grade parents, we will be especially looking for volunteers to help with the Celebration of Middle School that happens at the end of the school year. Looking forward to seeing all of you there on these nights.

As we do each year, we review the past year and decide what went well and what needs to be improved. We are always looking for ways to maximize the "learning time" for our students. We will be modifying our schedule a little this year to allow for all students to explore their individual learning needs. This schedule modification also allows for our students who are in band and/or chorus time for rehearsals and practices during the school day. It will also allow our Learning Labs to see students who need extra help without these students having to miss an Allied Art offering or a content area subject. Our Learning Labs were very successful in providing students with the extra help they needed to be successful students and these changes offer more time during the day. Another very important benefit of this schedule shift is that our students who are identified as "Gifted and Talented" will have a time to meet with Mrs. Knott. We are very excited about this shift and we believe that we can meet the needs of all of our students.

Another change we will implement this year is that our 8<sup>th</sup> grade students will have an option to elect either French or Spanish for a semester long course. Our hope is that this more intensive language program will ready our students for high school language courses and implement one of the recommendations of the Gorham School District's 21<sup>st</sup> Century Committee.

We have scheduled the student picture day for September 9th. This will allow for plenty of time for picture re-takes and will make sure that all families receive their child's picture in plenty of time for the holiday giving season.

Last year we were preparing for the outbreak of H1N1 flu. This planning took up much of our time planning for vaccination clinics, potential school closings and a plethora of updates from the Maine Centers of Disease Control. Teresa Merrill, our school nurse, did an exemplary job of keeping our staff updated and current with the latest findings and guidelines. While we hope that we will not need to spend anywhere near the time we did last year, we must remain vigilant. Thus, we will continue to ask parents to keep children home at the first sign of fever or respiratory illness. We understand that this is a true burden upon parents, but your vigilance last year paid off and we remained relatively free from large-scale absences.

At long last, this year, the middle school is implementing an Advisory program. Advisory is the true backbone of what a middle school is. As Turning Points: Preparing American

Youth for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century states, "...Every student should be well known by at least one adult. Students should be able to rely on that adult to help learn from their experiences, comprehend physical changes and changing relations with family and peers, act on their behalf to marshal every school and community resource needed for a student to succeed, and help to fashion a promising new vision of the future."

Therefore, your child will be a member of an advisory group of less than 15 students with one teacher. They will start each morning with their advisor for about 10 minutes and then meet twice each week with their advisor. The advisory groups will have some serendipitous activities that will be designed by the group as well as some school wide activities designed to enhance the understanding of the world the inhabit. Again, we are pleased at the work of our faculty planning and preparing implementation of this important and beneficial program. Students will meet their advisor on the first day of school.

We know how important these years are for our students and your children. Speaking for the entire faculty and staff at GMS, we are honored and privileged to be a part of your children's lives and we commit ourselves to an excellent school year.

Please continue to enjoy this wonderful summer weather; I remember last year writing this letter in the midst of a terrible spell of rain and cool weather and wondering when summer would arrive. At least to this point in time, we have very little to complain about, except perhaps the injury bug of the Red Sox.

Sincerely,

Robert J. Riley  
Principal

Susie Hanley  
Assistant Principal