

Gorham Middle School
FALL Parent Letter
2010-2011

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Within this fall letter you will find a lot of vital information about many of our structures and practices that have stayed the same and a few that have been improved and others that have changed. Please read this letter and feel comfortable to call the school office or your child's advisor for further clarification.

In the past we have sent out a large package of information and forms within the summer mailing and we have found that we spend too much time recreating the packets as they get lost in the summer shuffle. In the first days of school your child brought home a packet of information for you to review and there will be papers that you will need to sign and return to the school. We thank you for your cooperation in advance.

- Emergency Contact Information Card
- Internet Safety Form
- Parent Volunteering Form
- Free and Reduced Lunch Forms
- Health and Medical Information Forms

** The Free and Reduced Lunch forms are critical, whether you qualify or not, as they are used to determine federal grant eligibility. Please examine these forms and please sign and return the forms at the earliest possible time.

Please go to the Gorham School website and go to information on the Food Service Program. Familiarize yourself with the prices and content of our value meals, and the prices of all the a la carte choices. Students need your guidance about what they can choose and how much money they can spend on food. We do not want them to strain your resources by what they choose for breakfast or lunch.

SEPTEMBER EVENTS:

Open House for 7th and 8th graders is scheduled for Wednesday, September 8th from 6:00 to 7:00 pm.

School Pictures- We have scheduled the student picture day for Thursday September 9th.

Vision and Hearing Screenings- On September 9 and 10, with the help of school nurses and parent volunteers we will accomplish the annual vision and hearing screenings for all 7th grade students.

Lap Top Parent Orientation Meetings- All parents are highly encouraged to come to ONE of these annual meetings. Our orientation meetings are Monday, September 13 and Tuesday, September 14 in the GMS Auditorium at 6:00PM. In order for your child to use and take home their school-issued lap top a parent or guardian must **attend one** of our Lap Top Orientation meetings.

Student Handbook- We are putting the finishing touches on our 2010-2011 student handbook. We will be posting the entire document to the GMS website within the very near future. We will have a few paper copies of the handbook in the office, but we are not going to print out and give each student a paper copy of the 40 page document.

School Dance- Our first school dance will be Friday, September 24 from 6:00-8:00 PM. Please know that the dress code is in effect during our dances and parents are encouraged to chaperone after you have been through volunteer training. We are always very appreciative if parents pick up their children promptly at 8:00 PM.

COMMON and ANNUAL REOCCURANCES:

School Information- The school's daily announcements and specific information regarding after school activities which is vital to parents and guardians will be found posted to the school's website. GMS newsletters are produced four times a year and are sent out from the office via student's backpacks as well as posted on to the school's website. Vital announcements that concern all students in Gorham will be on the district's website (gorhamschools.org) and will be posted within the Infinite Campus system.

H1N1/Seasonal clinics- The school district nurses will help us to prepare for the necessary vaccinations clinics and other preventative measures, that may need to be put in place again this year to keep our students safe. We ask you as parents or guardians to keep your child at home at the first sign of a fever, and a sore throat or cough. Families should make a back up plan for child care if parents must be at work. **We do ask that you do not send your child to school if the above conditions are present.**

SSR (Silent Sustained Reading)- Most vital to your child's success in school and life is their ability to read as a method for understanding their world. We wholeheartedly encourage reading at school encouraging students to read across different genres and sources of text. We hope for your partnership in aiding your child's reading development by encouraging and supporting their independent reading at home and at school. Students will have an SSR period three days a week at the end of their school day. Each student needs to have a book that they are actively reading for the SSR period. If your child struggles to find books they like to read, please talk with their advisor or ELA teacher for suggestions.

Student Planners- All of our students are provided a planner for their use. They are to have their planner with them daily at school and are asked to bring it to every class. Students should bring home their planners each night. It is a communication tool. We believe it is important to be public and consistent about developing their organizational skills through the use of the planner. All teachers will leave time within their class periods to have students write the assignment(s) for the day. Advisors will be checking regularly to see that their students are using their planners on a daily basis. When a child says they have no homework, encourage them to study: reread texts, review notes, study for an upcoming assessment, practice for a presentation or read a book.

Homework Hotline- We continue to provide a telephone-based daily recording service that allows students and parents to check the daily and short range homework assignments given by all their teachers. The Homework Hotline number is 222-1290. The service will prompt you to your child's grade level and then their team. The system will be updated daily by each team. Please let us know if there seems to be something wrong with the system or if your child's team is lagging in their updates.

Homework Club- We continue to provide an after school homework support service for our students that need it. Homework Club is for students who need a quiet and supervised place in which to do their homework. Multiple educational technicians who have worked within the club for years run the program. They know the curriculum, work well with the students, as well as supervise and support them to do their work. Parents, teachers can refer students to Homework Club, and some students refer

themselves.

Parent Portal- The Parent Portal within the Infinite Campus system allows parents and students to keep well abreast of the student's work production habits, their performance. The system allows all teachers to input homework assignments, class activity work and projects, as well as quizzes and test or show that work is missing and needs to be produced and turned in. Having this up-to-date information helps the family and the student's teachers communicate, working to make improvements early and consistently. For parents who have already been provided an access code that should still work for you. If you are having trouble please call the school's guidance office after September 7th. Parents will be provided with an access code for the system through the school's guidance office if they aren't currently using the system.

Student Email- Every student in grades 6-12 is issued an email account and a password. They can use email to communicate with peers about assignments (within school) and socially (out of school) given that such systems will be a part of their future. Many students need to learn its use in a safe and structured way. Inappropriate email use during school as well as other inappropriate uses of one's computer will be monitored and brought to the student and family's attention when necessary.

*** We respectfully ask that parents NOT email or text message their child during the school day. If you need to contact your child to pass them a message please call the office and we will get a message to your child or have them call you from the office.

Power Standards- Our school district continues to move in the direction of standards-based teaching, learning and reporting. At the middle school, teachers within content areas have selected a few power standards per content area, that are the most vital content and skills that every student at that grade level needs to learn and demonstrate. Student performance will be reported out to the family four times per year within our dual reporting system. Students will receive letter grades (A,B,C) and a reporting of their current status given the power standards (1-4 scale) and they will also be given a rating in regard to their learning skills (initiative, cooperation) within the system as well. We encourage parents and guardians to be in close communication with their child's content team of teachers and their advisor to request information, meetings and additional conferences as needed.

Algebra- (8th Grade only) We continue to give the Orleans-Hanna Algebra readiness exam at the end of the 7th grade year to determine which student have demonstrated the pre-requisite skills in order to take the Algebra class offered within the 8th grade year. This process does have a strict *cut score* which we have found through experience does work as a method for identifying those who are ready for the experience and hard work. Please understand that all students in all grades are taught Algebra, and those who do not take it in 8th grade will still have opportunities to take all the high school classes they may want to take in their future.

NEW ITEMS:

K-12 conferencing- This last year the district's administrative team changed the way in which the district uses its time for student, parent and teacher conferencing. Fall conferencing dates are now the evening of Thursday, OCTOBER 28 and all day Friday, OCTOBER 29. Spring conference dates are set for the evening of Thursday, MARCH 24 and all day Friday, MARCH 25. We know that within some families this new schedule will take more communication and coordination across schools and we are willing to help as we all get used to the new system.

NECAPS only fall, NWEA only spring- As you know all school district's engage in some type of external testing measures to assess student proficiency in basic literacies (math, reading, and language usage), and content understanding related to the state's content standards. The NECAP is an annual paper and pencil assessment that is related to the state's content standards and is administered in the fall in early October. Last year the administrative team decided that the district would only test students in our school using the computer-based NWEA test in the spring. Students scores on these assessments allow teachers to determine where students have strengths and where they need additional instruction and supports.

Schedule Changes- As a school, we continue to work to develop a schedule that is best for our student's learning and allows us as a school to provide the varied services that our students need to receive. We have a) added a homeroom time each morning with a student's advisor, b) given 50 minutes for each core class (math, science, ELA, and social studies), and c) made minor changes in our Allied Arts offerings. Further explanations of changes to the schedule are explained below.

I/E/CAL- I= Interventions in ELA or Math for student in any grade who are a year or more below grade level; E= Enrichment for gifted identified students at level 3; CAL= Content Area Literacy for everyone else. In order to provide the supports that many of our students need in order to do well in school and reach their potential, we have built into the schedule a period daily for them to be pulled out of the mix to receive specialized instruction given the goals of their IEP's, or to receive interventions in our Learning Labs, or to have opportunities for enrichment activities if a student is GT identified. For all other students, teachers within their teams will have a Content Area Learning period, a time for content area teachers to explicitly teach thinking, reading and content area discipline skills beyond their content area class.

No tutorial- In the past, we devoted a period a day to a tutorial period and found that it was used in many and varied ways. Many students and teachers used it as a study hall and some used it as a time to conference with students, make up work, and retake assessments. There is no tutorial period built into our schedule any longer and students, teachers and parents need to know and plan for homework to be done after school (at home, in the school library, in Homework Club) and in the evening at home.

Advisory- As we continue to progress as a developing middle school, one structure that defines that culture is the use and role of a student Advisory program. Advisories will cluster 12-15 students with an adult supervisor for homeroom in the morning, and for structured activities on Wednesday and Friday afternoons. A student's advisor will be someone who gets to know them on a personal basis and will be involved in discussing grade appropriate topics, goal setting, time and work management, and learning interpersonal skills in a small group setting. **Advisors are responsible for setting up and facilitating the parent/student conferences with their advisory students and their parents or guardians twice a year on the days designated for K-12 conferencing.**

SPECIAL REQUESTS:

Please contact your student's their advisor, their team of content area teachers, the school guidance office or the school administration as soon and as and as often as you have concerns about lockers, buses, harassment or bullying, laptops, homework completion, and grade performance.

PIE Meetings- Parents and Guardians are valuable partners in their child's schooling experience and we will be continuing to hold *Partners in Education* (PIE) meetings in order to engage parents in

discussing topical information with regard to education and our school in particular. We urge parents to come to the meetings which are publicized and held in our school library in the evening each month.

Parent Volunteering- We love parent volunteers!! Even though your child might hesitate to have you involved in their schooling experience at this developmental level, we do have a need to parents to serve as: field trip chaperones, dance chaperones, presenters on Early Release Days, assistants within health screenings, makers of foodstuffs for teacher appreciation days, working to help us provide breakfast offerings on testing days, and lending much needed help during vaccine clinics. All parent volunteers must be registered and trained on an annual basis by folks within the G.C.V.C.E office.

Student Arrival and Pick Up – Students who are being dropped off at school by their parents need to be here by 7:45 to participate in homeroom which is a vital time of the day. Students arriving after 8:00AM will be considered and marked as tardy. Students and families need to know that 3 tardies equals an after school detention. Students being picked up by their parent will need to wait until busses have rolled at 2:15PM. Students being picked up by parents will be dismissed with the walkers and those staying after school for a variety of activities.

We are looking forward to having your child flourish at Gorham Middle School. We are anticipating a great 2010-2011 school year and we hope you are as well. Please contact us for any information or regarding any concerns you may have at any time.

Robert Riley
Principal
ext. 222-1228

Susie Hanley
Assistant Principal
ext. 222-1245