

Principal's Newsletter

Principal John R. Koch

Happy Fall to Everyone!

I am writing this message after close to 70 days of sunshine—a rare occurrence here in Oregon but definitely a welcome one. The school year has started off surprisingly well. Overall student behavior has been very good and the classrooms are running smoothly. I can confidently say that the rooms are running smoothly because the evidence of improved behavior is quite impressive. Three years ago the Main Office staff processed about 2,100 behavior referral. Two years ago that number dropped to just under 1,300. Last year we experienced just under 1,100.

This continued improvement in student behavior is a credit to our staff and the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports system that we incorporated at about that time. We are one of the few high school in the region using this system and our PBIS team is receiving regional recognition for our success. This September we saw half the referrals we did last year so we have high hopes for continued success this year.

Parents and guardians, we cannot do it without you so anything you can do to reinforce the REAL concept (Respect, Excellence, Accountability, and Leadership) is appreciated.

Currently there are 1,782 students enrolled at GHS. This bump in total enrollment is not unusual. However, we do have a much larger freshman group than predicted. This increase in students is mostly due to students moving into our attendance area over the summer. The result of this influx of students are much higher than expected numbers in Algebra I classes. Because class sizes were simply too high in this area some changes were made to the master schedule including the addition of two sections of Algebra I. This necessary change had many students experiencing unwanted schedule adjustments and there was no way to avoid this problem. I sincerely appreciate the cooperation of those that were affected.

No matter what, classes are crowded and the prognosis for the future is more of the same. Through all of this I continue to be impressed and pleased with the effort our students and teachers continue to give to make a very tough situation as good as it can be. I am very proud to say that I am the principal for such a great group of kids and staff

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Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

Gresham High School is one of the first high schools in the region to use this system to help manage student behavior. Prior to our pioneering efforts PBIS was viewed mainly as an elementary/middle school model for managing students. We have experienced great success thus far and are very hopeful for the next phases of implementation. Our success can be directly attributed to a creative, core group of teachers who understood the vision and did great work making that vision reality. Schools that use PBIS start the process by developing an acronym that makes it easy for everyone to remember the core values of that institution. All expectations are then taught to students using that foundation. At GHS our acronym is REAL.

GHS has experienced some impressive results. Over the last 27 months we have reduced our student referrals to the office for discipline by 50% and that trend seems to be continuing.

However, it will be difficult to continue this trend without the support of the broader community. One of the easiest and best ways for parents and guardians to help us continue this trend is to reinforce the values of REAL at home. Talk with your children about what these concepts mean to you and our school. Your reinforcement will go a long way toward helping us make all of our students successful.

At Gresham High School our core values are summed up in the acronym R.E.A.L.

R stands for RESPECT

- Treat yourself and others with dignity
- Use appropriate language
- Be an active listener
- Take care of public spaces
- Use technology appropriately

E stands for EXCELLENCE:

- Challenge yourself to do your best
- Keep a positive attitude
- Demonstrate responsibility for learning
- Be involved and engaged
- Think critically and ask questions

A is for ACCOUNTABILITY:

- Be a team player and keep commitments
- Follow the rules
- Attend class everyday, on time
- Be prepared
- Meet established deadlines

L is for LEADERSHIP:

- Influence others to do the right thing
- Model good behavior
- Take initiative
- Be a catalyst for positive change
- Build relationships and help others



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Late Arrival Wednesdays

This is the first year of our new schedule including late arrival Wednesdays. There have been many questions about what the staff is doing with this time. This brief paragraph should provide an explanation. There are 38 Wednesdays in the school year. Nineteen of those Wednesdays are designated for professional development time. At GHS we are focusing on learning

more efficient and targeted methods for assessing student learning. Although this sounds simple, it is actually a complex undertaking that will take several years to implement. Given the shorter periods and high class sizes this work is critical to our future success and improvement. On the other 19 Wednesdays teachers use

that time to work with colleagues, plan their classes and otherwise complete the important work that keeps classrooms running smoothly. In the end, this time is extremely valuable and we wish we had more of it. If you have further questions please do not hesitate to ask.



First Period Tardiness and General Attendance

Classroom integrity is a goal that we constantly strive to maintain. Many different factors go into maintaining classroom integrity including lesson preparation, student performance feedback, student behavior management, and attendance. Attendance is one of the things that we have very little control over. On top of that, one of the measures of school success at the state level is student attendance even though we have very little control over student choices about whether to come to school or not.

One of our major efforts this school year is to improve student attendance. Believe it or not good attendance, especially for freshman, is directly correlated to graduating on time their senior year. The good news is that we are having solid success so far—with

the exception of tardiness to school. **We are averaging 58 students late to first period each day. On some days we have close to 100 students late.** The conundrum is that most students are not repeat offenders. There have been **673** different students late to school. That number constitutes about **40%** of the total student body. **341** students have had one tardy and **148** students have had two.

As a staff we have several concerns with tardiness. The first is that being on time is a work skill. Since school is a student's primary job and the stakes for graduating (passing state tests, gaining credit, etc.) are so high it is critical that students be present at the beginning of each period so that they do not miss the initial instruction. Not only is re-

teaching extra work for the teacher, the late student only receives a summary of the instruction rather than the benefit of hearing it first hand, and the teacher's time to help other students with their work is also impacted.

The bottom line is that we are going to take measures to reduce the amount of tardiness to school. Some of those interventions may involve community service after school or before school. We have tried other things but these measures are not having the effect that we would hope. As parents and guardians any help you can give to get your students out the door earlier will be greatly appreciated.

Almost 700 students have been late to first period so far this year! That is 700 classroom interruptions that did not have to occur!

Grading and Workload Challenges for all

It is no secret that the high schools in our district have moved to a seven period day. As with any substantial change that are long lists of pros and cons associated with the new schedule. One unavoidable fact is that the new schedule requires substantial change in how we instruct our students. As with any large change, time and effort are essential ingredients to making change happen.

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Even though changing instructional practices sounds simple, it really is not. Second order change of this nature takes time and resources but I am confident that we will overcome this challenge. However, some of the bigger hurdles preventing us from making a more rapid and smooth adjustment is the increased amount of grading associated with the schedule change. Other challenges include increased instructional time (a good thing) but shorter periods, the loss of preparation time to get that grading completed in a timely fashion (a challenge), and the indirect consequence of a down economy and much higher class sizes that result from less revenue.

Here is the reality. Most teachers are seeing between 200 and 220 students each day. Teachers are provided 50 minutes of planning time during the school day each day to write and organize lesson plans and grade. There is also about that amount of time available after school unless meetings are scheduled. This allocation of time to prep, grade, communicate with parents, and meet as a staff is almost a 40% reduction from the past.



Here is a second reality. Assignments must be given and graded so that teachers and students understand the level of learning happening in our classrooms. If a teacher gives one graded assignment every other day he or she will have 400-600 papers a week to correct. If those papers are writing assignments the typical correcting time per paper is five minutes. For that writing assignment, the total time needed to correct it is frequently 30 hours or more. In other words, just correcting that one assignment will use all of the available time a teacher has during the week and leaves almost no opportunity to post grades on line, communicate with parents, and provide help to students outside of class.

Here is the third reality. The resources needed to adjust for this new reality are simply not available and it will be 2-4 years more before they begin to return. The economic circumstances surrounding us are not a secret and are being felt worldwide. They are driving decisions that force very tough choices for all of us from state level government to local agencies like school districts. The lack of resources is not anyone's fault, but is simply the new reality all of us live under.

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Confronted with these realities I could not be more proud of the Gresham High School staff as well as their families. Despite the challenges we face which are unlike anything schools have seen for fifty or more years, teachers are continuing to come to work each day, digging in, and constantly working to solve problems. They are beginning to refine how they teach and how they grade, but much of this work is happening on the backs of their spouses and children on weekends, early mornings and evenings. They make this sacrifice willingly so that our students still get the best that we are able to give.

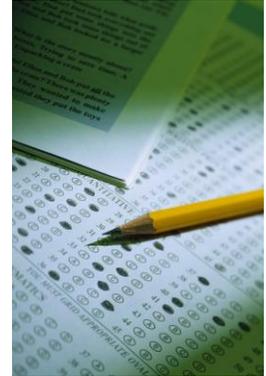
PSAT

Last Wednesday, 377 Gresham High sophomores took advantage of the opportunity to take the PSAT exam. The strong showing, which represented 87% of the 10th grade class, was reflective of a collaborative effort among Gresham High families, faculty, and district transportation. Apart from sophomores, an additional

94 students (mostly juniors) also opted-in to take the exam.

The state of Oregon provides for PSAT testing of 10th graders in order to give students an early opportunity to take a college entrance exam and to receive feedback on their potential for college or advanced level courses. On average, students who take the

PSAT score 145 points higher on the SAT than those who do not. The PSAT also provides entry into National Merit Scholarship competitions and other scholarship and recognition programs. PSAT score reports and interpretive materials are expected to be delivered to GHS some time in December.



Education Summit, October 30, 2012

You're invited to attend a community-wide forum on how the schools in the Gresham-Barlow School District could change to best meet the needs of today's students. Join us and share your thoughts on how to increase student achievement, alternative programs needed to ensure every student graduates on time and

how we can maintain the community's investment in the district's 19 schools. You will also hear an update on the district's strategic plan.

The forum takes place on October 30 from 6 to 8:30 p.m. at Grace Community Church (800 Southeast Hogan Road) in Gresham. Check-in begins at 6:00

p.m. To attend, register online at www.gresham.k12.or.us or call Joy Helfrich at 503-618-2646. Translation services available on request

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