

## GORHAM SCHOOL DEPARTMENT

*Office of the Superintendent*

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Dear Parents/Guardians,

It is with great anticipation and excitement that I welcome you back for another incredible school year here within the Gorham Schools! The first day of school for students in grades K, 6, and 9 will be Monday, August 29, 2016. The first day of school for all other students will be Tuesday, August 30, 2016. Bus routes have just recently been published. You may view them by going to the Gorham Schools website found at: [www.gorhamschools.org](http://www.gorhamschools.org). Just click on the "transportation" link to the left of the page and they should be right at the top. They will also be published in the Gorham Times next edition. I would like to request patience and understanding for the first few weeks of school as we iron out the details of our bus routes for another new school year. If you have any questions regarding routes, please contact Judy at the Transportation Office (893-2547). If you have any questions about enrollment of your child, please contact your school's office. You can also find those numbers by going to our district website and clicking on the appropriate school tab. As mentioned last year, our district website is getting ready for a new "upgrade" and we are planning on rolling that out early this fall - so "stay tuned" for when those changes take place so that you don't miss any important information.

All of our schools are excited to welcome you and your children to another tremendous school year here in Gorham! As always, there are lots of outstanding things happening at our schools so be sure to check out those school websites, keep an eye on your mail and email, and watch for fliers and other materials that will be sent home with your students the first few days of school to let you know about many of these exciting planned events.

One piece of exciting news is that we will be rolling out our new Gorham Schools mission and vision and core beliefs with staff during our opening staff day planned for August 25, 2016. However, because parents are our special partners in educating our children, I am going to share it with all of you first! If you remember, this is the culmination of a full year's worth of work by staff, students, parents, and community members. Way back in September of last year, the Gorham School Committee authorized the creation of a district steering committee whose task it was to "re-vision" our mission and vision. This committee worked to put together surveys and public forums and focus group interviews to gather feedback culminating in over 2,800 participants - the largest group of which were parents! The steering committee compiled

all this feedback to establish themes in the content and then used those themes to create a newly "re-visioned" mission, vision, and set of core beliefs for the Gorham Schools that will be used to chart a course for this district over the next 3-5 years!

You can check out the results of this incredible work by going to: [http://www.gorhamschools.org/core\\_documents/](http://www.gorhamschools.org/core_documents/)

The next steps in this important work will be to develop, with our stakeholder groups over the course of the 2016-17 School Year, a Strategic Plan, complete with action steps and timelines that will become the "map" allowing us to make this new vision a reality for our children. Exciting work for sure! There will be opportunities for parents and community members to become involved in this work whether it be by active membership on the committee that steers this work, or through participation in surveys and/or focus groups or public forums so again, please stay tuned!

The Gorham Schools pride ourselves in staying abreast of best instructional practices to support your children's learning and as a result, our schools are also busy planning and implementing some new initiatives that we hope will enhance your child's educational experiences within our schools. Whether it is the implementation of our new reading curriculum for grades 3-5 (Making Meaning) or extending our Pilot of Jumprope, our standards-based grading and reporting software, at the Middle School, or the implementation of our new schedule at Gorham High School - there are lots of exciting things going on in our schools! Of course, none of these exciting things is more important than our continued work on creating a Proficiency-Based Learning System (PBL). The creation and implementation of our PBL system will be the key driving force that will allow us to make our new mission and vision a reality for our children. Our focus for this year's PBL work at each grade level will be:

- \* K-5 will be extending and strengthening our pilot of tracking student learning progress in ELA, Math and now Science, Social Studies, and the Creative Arts using our new standards-based reporting software system called Jumprope. Final student grades will still be reported to parent/guardians using the traditional reporting systems, but how teachers arrive at those final reported grades will be tracked differently for these content areas. Be sure to ask your child's teacher about this as we move through the school year if you have questions!

- \* K-5 will also be working on creating a Skills for Life rubric that will allow us to track these essential learning skills separately from academic/content skills and report out to parents their student's progress in mastering these skills. What we call Skills for Life are target skills and behaviors that are important for all students to have and exhibit to maximize their learning. Students will be measured on the development of skills such as: Preparation for Learning, Engagement with learning, and Communication with peers and adults to support their learning. Our hope is to create the rubric this year, pilot it in the fourth quarter, and then revise as necessary to prepare for full utilization in the 2017-18 School Year.

- \* 6-8 will be piloting with our teachers the tracking of student progress in several key content areas using Jumprope as well. During the fourth quarter last year, grade 7 students in the content area of science piloted the use of Jumprope. This pilot will

continue at the 7th-grade level, again in the area of science, and then extend into 8th-grade science as well as some select 8th-grade world language and creative arts classes.

Other grade level and content area teachers may also experiment with the utilization of Jumprope, but those listed above will report out to parents using Jumprope and the parent portal for Jumprope will be open for parents to view their student's work for those courses.

\* 9-12 will also begin working to pilot the use of Jumprope. This will be done with some selected 9th-grade teachers and content areas "behind the scenes". Final student grades will still be reported to parent/guardians using the traditional reporting systems.

In addition to these areas of focus per grade level, all teachers in grades K-12 will be working to develop a system for tracking and reporting student progress on skills associated with the Guiding Principles, and developing strong assessments that are aligned to our Graduation Standards and Performance Indicators so that we can track student learning progress with fidelity. Finally, teachers in grades K-12 will be working to coordinate all of our initial PBL work across grades K-12 to make sure our total system is completely aligned and flows together smoothly so that our students can graduate from Gorham High School prepared to successfully meet any challenge our complex world may throw at them!

We know that many parents may still not understand exactly what PBL is, or why the Gorham Schools has worked so hard over the past few years to create this new system to benefit our students. Therefore, another major goal this year will be to engage parents, students and community members in conversations about our PBL work so that we can work together to improve both an awareness of what the work entails so that we can all better understand why it is so important for our children, and to promote continued support for the work at all levels. We will be working to host informal sit-down conversations with parents at all grade levels on an every-other-month basis this year for this very purpose. Additionally, we will work to incorporate PBL information into school level newsletters, blog posts, and news articles. Finally, we will be working to create several "PBL Handbooks" that will be posted on our website. Our hope is that through this multi-pronged communications approach, we might be able to provide the answers to many of the questions you have while simultaneously listening to your feedback and making sure we are staying true to our new mission, vision, and core beliefs as we continue this important work.

Finally, I wanted to remind all parents/guardians of our excellent volunteer program here in the Gorham School Department. The Gorham Schools are well known for our robust volunteer programs where parents and community members are encouraged to actively participate in the educational processes of our schools in various ways. Last year we had well over 2,000 hours donated to our schools by our awesome volunteers! THANK YOU! Each year we welcome new volunteers into our classrooms and work to align the specific skills of our volunteers with the needs of our students. In order to continue to keep this program vibrant and strong, WE NEED YOU! In order to make sure our students are safe, and that we are working to help meet the needs of all children through our volunteer programs, we also need you TO REGISTER. This registration process is required for both short and longer-term commitments. All of our forms can be found on the district website at <http://www.gorhamschools.org/volunteer/>. When

parents/community members click on the link it will take you to the Gorham Schools Volunteer Program website where the process is outlined and the individual forms can be accessed. The forms will be updated and accessible by August 22nd. You may also inquire at your school's Principal's office for more information.

In closing, I would just like to share how proud I am to be your Superintendent of Schools here in Gorham. If there is one thing I learned via my 250+ entry plan interviews conducted last year (my first year) with parents, staff, students, and community members, it is that our community strongly supports our schools and cares greatly about the success of our children - and that our schools care deeply about our community and its success as well. Our students understand what a community truly means, mostly because our community models what it means for our students on a day in and day out basis. Our students strive to live our Code of Conduct by demonstrating respect, honesty, courage, compassion, and responsibility because our community as a whole actually lives it! I know I've only been here a year - but already - I am a Ram through and through! I look forward to another great year this year!

Please do not hesitate to reach out to me with questions, comments, or concerns. My email is [heather.perry@gorhamschools.org](mailto:heather.perry@gorhamschools.org) and my office phone number is 222-1012.

GO RAMS!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Heather J. Perry", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Heather J. Perry,  
Superintendent of Schools