Reminder:
Half Day of School
for students this Friday, 1/16.

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Superintendent's Update – January 12, 2015

The community of the Griswold Public Schools educates for excellence by empowering students to become compassionate, confident, creative, and resourceful members of society. **- Griswold 2022**

Change your thoughts and you change your world.

~Norman Vincent Peale

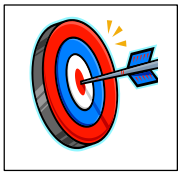
Calendar

- **Monday, January 12 – Board of Education Meeting in the GMS Library, 6:00 PM.** ***The budget season officially begins this evening!*** The Superintendent of Schools will present the 2015-16 Budget to the Board of Education. If you want to get accurate information concerning the 2015-16 Budget directly from the source, this is the meeting for you. Come and bring a friend! This year's budget process is crucial to our continuing success as a school district. Getting correct information to people this year is the way to avoid last year's referenda saga.
- **Tuesday, January 13 – Optional faculty meeting for GHS / GMS in the GMS Library, 2:30 PM.** This optional meeting will provide important Budget information to teachers and staff members of GHS and GMS. All are urged to attend and ask questions!
- **Tuesday, January 13 – Griswold Elementary School PTO Meeting in the GES Library, 6:00 PM.**
- **Wednesday, January 14 – "Honesty" Rally in the GES Cafeteria, Grades PK, K. 1 at 2:00 PM and Grades 2, 3, 4 at 2:30 PM.** As part of the school and district initiative on "character," GES will celebrate the notion of "honesty."
- **Wednesday, January 14 – Superintendent's Advisory Council in the Superintendent's Office, 7:30 AM & 8:45 AM.** This month's Advisory meeting will feature a presentation of 2015-16 Budget to parents by the Superintendent of Schools. This is a meeting in which parents can ask any and all questions about the budget and the budget process.
- **Wednesday, January 14 – Grade 6 Winter Concert in the GMS Auditorium, 7:00 PM.**
- **Thursday, January 15 – Optional faculty meeting for GES in the GES Library, 3:45 PM.** This optional meeting will provide important Budget information to teachers and staff members of GES. All are urged to attend and ask questions!
- **Friday, January 16 – HALF DAY of School: Professional Development in the afternoon. This half-day model of Professional Development is new this year – so please make sure that you have this date marked in your calendar!** Griswold High School and Griswold Middle School will be dismissed at **12:00 Noon** and Griswold Elementary School will be dismissed at **1:10 PM**. Lunches will be served on these half days and regular bus transportation will be provided as on all half days.

Friday, January 16 – Griswold Middle School Select Choir performance at the Providence Bruins Game, 7:05 PM. Go to the game and enjoy some hockey along with the GMS Select Choir under the direction of Kathy Bocciarelli. Contact Kathy for information on tickets at kbocciarelli@griswoldpublicschools.org to order tickets!

- **Monday, January 19 – Martin Luther King Day, No School.**

- **Tuesday, January 20 – BOE Policy Subcommittee in the Superintendent's Office, 9:00 AM.**
- **Tuesday, January 20 – Special Board of Education Meeting in the GMS Library, 6:00 PM.** Budget information from the GES, GMS, and GHS Principals at a Special Board of Education Meeting.
- **Monday, January 26 – Board of Education Meeting in the GMS Library, 6:00 PM.** Budget information by Technology, Curriculum, and Special Education at the Board of Education Meeting.
- **Wednesday, January 28 – Christa McAuliffe Recognition Day.**
- **Wednesday, January 28 – GES School Family Community Partnership in the GES Library, 3:30 PM.**
- **Friday, January 30 – Grade 7 & 8 Dance in the GMS Cafeteria, 6:00-8:00 PM.**
- **Monday, February 2 – Public Hearing on the School Budget / Special Board of Education Meeting in the GMS Auditorium, 6:00 PM.** There will be a presentation on the School Budget and there will be time for comments and questions from the audience.
- **Tuesday, February 3 – Parent-School Collaboration Special Education Meeting in the Special Education Office (Room 3105) at GHS, 9:00 AM.** This is an opportunity for parents to meet with the Director of Special Education monthly.
- **Wednesday, February 4 – National School Counselors Appreciation Day.** Take time to thank our school Guidance Counselors, Social Workers, and School Psychologists!
- **Wednesday, February 4 – GPS Building Committee in the GES Library, 6:00 PM.**
- **Wednesday, February 4 – Griswold High School Parents Advisory Committee (PAC) in the GHS Library, 7:00 PM.** This month's meeting will include information on the 2015-16 Budget.



- **Wednesday, February 4 – Target Meeting in the GMS Library, 5:30 Dinner PM & 6:00 PM Meeting.** The February Target Meeting will focus on evaluating the targets from the "Family Engagement" Target evening and the "Budget" Target evening. We will talk about the next steps for engaging families and promoting participation in the budget process – two important and related factors for our children!

If you would like a school event/meeting listed in the Calendar section, please forward date and information to Paul Smith: psmith@griswoldpublicschools.org.

Notes

How is your knowledge of Civics?

In the State of Connecticut, a course in Civics at the high school level is a requirement for graduation. All of students at GHS must pass this course in order to graduate. In some states, they are contemplating issuing a standardized test in civics/citizenship in order to graduate. Read the article and then **take the quiz at the end** to test your own knowledge!

Could you pass a citizenship test? From an article in the *Christian Science Monitor* By Jared Gilmour

If you want to graduate from high school in North Dakota, you better start buffing up on your American history and government.

Lawmakers in North Dakota unveiled legislation Monday that would require high school students to get 60 questions right on a 100-question civics test before they graduate. These range from the number of justices on the Supreme Court to the number of amendments to the Constitution. Immigrants hoping to become US citizens must correctly answer six of 10 questions randomly chosen from the 100-question test.

North Dakota is the latest state mulling a requirement that students pass a citizenship test before they're handed a diploma. At least seven other states are considering similar measures. It's part of a broad effort to increase youth civic engagement, at a time when many worry that students know more about Taylor Swift than Zachary Taylor.

"The people who favor this have widely differing political beliefs," said North Dakota first lady Betsy Dalrymple when announcing the measure on Monday. "But they share the belief that it is important for all Americans to know about the first principles of our constitutional government."

But some are skeptical that a citizenship test is the best way to get students excited about US government and politics. Others question whether the US citizenship test is the most logical way to promote youth engagement.

"The solution is not more testing of everything. We already have excessive testing going on in schools," says Marya Levenson, director of the education program at Brandeis University in Waltham, Mass.

Ms. Levenson – a former high school civics teacher herself – says schools should foster dialogue around unresolved issues such as immigration and gay marriage.

"The controversies are what really engage our students. We need to present multiple sides and ask our students to think themselves about how they would begin to resolve it," Levenson says.

Even if a test can bolster students' knowledge of government, the US citizenship test may not be the test for the job, says Darrell West, director of governance studies at the Brookings Institution, a Washington-based think tank.

"These types of tests evaluate encyclopedia knowledge," Mr. West says, adding that the citizenship test "doesn't really focus on broad issues or controversies, which tend to be the things that engage people in the political process."

West points to the College Board's government test as a more reliable tool to evaluate students' mastery of civics.

The citizenship test given to new Americans is far from perfect. It isn't a reliable measure of civics knowledge, according to a 2011 Michigan State University study, and political scientists say one question the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) put on the test could be incorrect – it implies the vice president is a member of the president's Cabinet.

"USCIS doesn't have any data that they offer to the public about this test in the way that testing companies would talk about their tests," says Paula Winke, a professor at Michigan State University and author of the 2011 study. That means that, to determine whether or not the test they offer is reliable, states would have to run their own analyses.

Supporters say a civics test is a step toward bolstering civics education in American schools. The exam is meant to be informative, not punitive, says Sam Stone, spokesperson for the Civics Education Initiative, the nonprofit pushing the test nationwide. Students would be able to take the test until they pass.

Announcing the legislation in North Dakota, Ms. Dalrymple said many students struggle with basic US history. Dalrymple cited studies showing many students don't know that George Washington was the first US president.

"Every new citizen has to demonstrate this knowledge, so this is creating a community standard of what we want everyone to know," Mr. Stone says. "This is a basic test."

Schools would have flexibility in giving the test, Stone adds, meaning students could wind up taking anything from a 10-question verbal exam to a 100-question written test.

North Dakota legislators will take up the bill in January. South Dakota, Arizona, Louisiana, Missouri, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Utah are all considering adopting the test as well, Stone told the AP.

Could you pass a U.S. Citizenship test? **Take the Monitor's US citizenship test to find out**

Internet Safety

In last week's Update, parents were urged to reserve the date: **Thursday, March 19 – Internet Safety for Parents in the GMS Auditorium.** Scott Driscoll will be our guest to present on Internet Safety for families. Scott is a regular presenter in Connecticut Schools for students and for adults. You can visit his website by clicking here.

Between computers and cell phones, our students have immediate access to many things without understanding how digital messaging and photos are easily accessible to audiences they may not realize. Helping them make good decisions is important!

I urge you to read the article, **"Why Kids Sext"** by Hanna Rosin in *The Atlantic*. **It is a must read!** Get it by clicking here. A brief description of the article follows, but all parents and educators should read the full article.

What Should Schools and Parents Do About Teenage Sexting? From the *Marshall Memo*, Kym Marshall

In this article in *The Atlantic*, Hanna Rosin reports on how a Virginia community dealt with the revelation that large numbers of middle- and high-school students were using their smartphones to send revealing photos to one another, some of which found their way into an Instagram account. Parents were up in arms, the police got involved, and a number of questions arose:

Is "total abstinence" the best position for parents and schools to take with teens on sexting? Do kids realize the possible college and career consequences of having compromising images online, not to mention the risk of adult stalkers getting involved – or is that message not credible? Should sexting be criminalized as child pornography, or should it be viewed as adolescent experimentation that deserves minor punishments and confiscation of offending phones? ("They're not violent criminals," said Dave Albo, chairman of Virginia's Courts of Justice committee. "If these kids made a dumb-a-- mistake, we don't want to ruin their future.") Is sexting "virtual dating" in the new era, less harmful than actual contact? ("A way of being sexual without being sexual, you know?" said one girl).

And what leads boys to put such intense pressure on girlfriends and acquaintances to share photos, sometimes sending 30 texts in a row? Why do some girls not read the danger signs of a highly persistent boy whom they have little reason to trust? What is the difference between girls who stoutly resist pressure from boys to sext and those who succumb? Is the old double standard at work, with some girls suffering social opprobrium while boys got a free pass – and then openly disrespecting girls who sext? And what are boys *thinking* when they forward photos to others? Is this bullying on steroids?

Marsha Levick of the Juvenile Law Center has a suggestion: "We should draw the line between my daughter stupidly sending a photo of herself to her boyfriend and her boyfriend sending it to all his friends to humiliate her. The first is stupid. The second is more troubling and should be criminal." But many parents don't buy the stupid-but-harmless argument (the first part of Levick's proposal). "I think this is coming from grown-ups who fear that their kids are doing things they don't understand," says Levick. "The technology is both hyper-visible and invisible, and parents are spooked by it. So kids are finding what's a normal part of adolescent experimentation being criminalized."

Interestingly, according to David Finkelhor of the Crimes Against Children Research Center, sex offenses against minors have declined significantly during the time-period in which sexting has become popular. Finkelhor speculates that the Internet and cellphone cameras have made it possible for teens to do their "risk taking" and "independence testing" online, which may reduce their exposure to actual violence and physical harm.

In cases involving minors, Rosin's article concludes, the two polarities are clear. "Uploading another minor's naked picture to the Web, where anyone might eventually find it, should be a criminal act, though not one that should necessarily be prosecuted as child porn. Taking a selfie and sending it to someone who might be receptive to it, or receiving a selfie and keeping it, should not be criminal at all… The nonconsensual sharing of pictures, even among just a few people, should probably count as a criminal act, as long as there is prosecutorial discretion. But even in these instances, the policing should, if possible, be left to teachers and parents, not to the actual police. Or in some cases to no one, because since when was any version of adolescent sexuality fair and free of pain?"

2015-16 Budget Update

Click for Budget Information

The budget season officially begins on Monday evening! The Superintendent of Schools will present the 2015-16 Budget recommendations on Monday evening, January 12 at 6:00 PM in the GMS Library. This is a great meeting to attend to get the facts on the 2015-16 Budget! If you are not able to attend, consider the other dates listed in the "Calendar" section above or check out the information on the school's website. **The Superintendent's Budget Presentation and the 2015-16 Budget Requests are now online – click here.**

January Employees of the Month

EMPLOYEE of the MONTH

JANUARY 2015

Jill Curioso & Lisa Sawyer

Griswold Public Schools

Technology Director & Technology Secretary

Jill and Lisa will be recognized at the January 26 Board of Education meeting at 6:00 PM in the GMS Library.

Thoughts

Critical Thinking is "STEM" thinking!

As we look for ways to bring our vision, *Griswold 2025*, to life in the classroom, it's not much of a stretch to see that the student outcomes of the vision support the type of thinking that we want students to be able to do when using science, math, technology, and engineering (STEM) in authentic learning experiences. The article below gives some great activities to promote critical thinking and while they are geared towards Science, the activities themselves are appropriate for a number of subjects! Consider trying an "association triangle," and evidence statements or evidence charts as described below.

STEM-ify Your Strategies by Claudia M. Geocaris at www.ASCD.org

Common Core State Standards, Next Generation Science Standards, assessment literacy—how are teachers supposed to do it all? Instead of adding more to their plates, teachers can use trusted, proven strategies to integrate STEM into their lessons. By focusing on three critical STEM skills—(1) thinking and planning like an expert, (2) connecting conceptual information and its application, and (3) using evidence to support thinking and conclusions—I will show teachers how implementing several classroom-ready tools and techniques can help them easily and effectively STEM-ify their instructional strategies.

Backwards Learning: Thinking Like an Expert

STEM education requires careful planning and design to account for the challenges that may arise when carrying out a project or experiment. That's why I always recommend to science teachers a technique called *backwards learning* (Boutz, Silver, Jackson, & Perini, 2012). Drawing on principles set forth in Wiggins and McTighe's Understanding by Design® framework, backwards learning teaches students a step-by-step process for analyzing a question or problem and breaking it down into "knowing" and "doing" goals. Before beginning an activity, students should ask themselves three questions:

1. What is my task? Can I clearly define the task in a way that I understand deeply?
2. What do I need to know and understand to complete this task?
3. What do I need to be able to do to complete this task?

For example, during a unit on sound, an elementary school teacher challenged her students to find a way to communicate with classmates across a distance. Before beginning the unit, she worked with the class to analyze this task using a backwards learning organizer (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Backwards Learning in Elementary Science

What is my task? We are going to be learning about sound and how it travels. I will need to make something that lets me talk to my friend who is on the other side of the classroom. I will share my ideas with the class.	
KNOWING GOALS **What will I need to know and understand?** How sound travels best What kinds of materials will work best How to make something new from the things I know	**DOING GOALS** **What will I need to be able to do?** Find out about sound using my science book, the Internet, and the school library Take notes on the information my teacher gives me and information I find on my own Research ways to talk over a long distance Create a good model that works Explain my model to the class

When using backwards learning for an engineering and design assessment, as in this example, be sure the task is clear. Then, have students use the technique to guide their learning process and help them see what their design solution needs to address before actually beginning to work on their model. Over time, give full control of the process to students so that they learn to think backwards as a matter of course when designing solutions to problems.

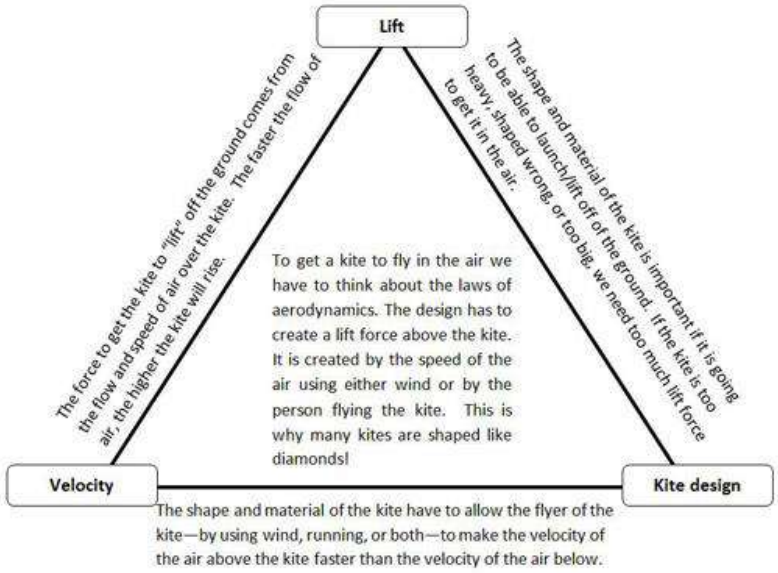
Association Triangles: Connecting Concepts to the Design Process

Too often, students make an artificial separation between the content they are learning and its application. Learning about science and actually "doing" science in labs and design projects are seen as two entirely separate things. This separation creates a glaring problem because STEM disciplines are meant to be applied. To get students in the habit of asking the question, "How can I use what I have learned to help me develop a solution?" I recommend a tool called an *association triangle* (Boutz, Silver, Jackson, & Perini, 2012).

In a traditional association triangle, students write three critical vocabulary terms at the points of the triangle. Then, they write a sentence along each side of the triangle that explains how the two terms relate to one another. Finally, students summarize the relationships among all three terms at the center of the triangle. Many of the teachers I work with report that this tool has allowed their students to move beyond just defining vocabulary terms and helped them to understand and explain the deeper relationships between the concepts.

Teachers can use this simple but powerful technique to enrich conceptual understanding in STEM classrooms, too. For example, a middle school lesson might challenge students to demonstrate their understanding of Bernoulli's Principle by designing a kite that will meet key design criteria (i.e., launches easily, glides on the wind, and withstands the typical stresses on a kite). Before students begin working, they complete an association triangle connecting the terms lift, velocity, and kite design, as shown in Figure 2 below. Ultimately, connecting these concepts to their applications deepens students' understanding and improves their designs.

Figure 2: Association Triangle for Kite Design



Reading for Meaning: Locating and Using Evidence

Common Core State Standards and Next Generation Science Standards emphasize evidence-gathering skills—that is, teaching students how to find evidence, evaluate it, and use it to support their conclusions. *Reading for meaning*, a strategy developed by Silver, Dewing, and Perini (2012), uses statements to train students to search texts for evidence that supports their positions. Statements can be true, false, or open to interpretation. In all cases, however, students must decide whether they agree or disagree with the statement and then record evidence that either supports or refutes it.

So, let's adapt this strategy to build STEM thinking, starting with data-analysis skills. For example, in a 3rd grade classroom, teachers might ask students to collect data on the weather for the first two weeks of school and compile a table like the one in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Data Table for Chicago Weather

Date (September)	Average Temperature (°F)	Precipitation (in.)
2	76	0.05
3	73	0.25
4	70	0.00
5	65	1.00
6	72	0.00
9	81	0.00
10	85	0.00
11	76	1.00
12	74	0.00
13	68	1.50

Then, to build students' ability to analyze and draw conclusions from the data, teachers can present students with statements like these:

1. September is a rainy month.
2. During these two weeks, there were more hot days than cool days.
3. The average temperature for these two weeks is about 70 degrees.
4. September is a good month to visit Chicago.

For each statement, students have to decide whether they agree or disagree. Then, they have to cite specific evidence from the data table or perform mathematical calculations to support their positions. Groups of students can compare their conclusions and the evidence they used to support these conclusions. Finally, different groups can try to reach consensus on each statement. If the groups cannot reach consensus on a particular statement, the teacher should encourage them to revise the statement so that all students can agree (or disagree). To extend this lesson, teachers can challenge students to use what they learned to design a piece of clothing they would sell to tourists visiting Chicago at this time of year.

Teachers can also adapt the reading for meaning technique to help students design better experiments or products. For example, a 5th grade teacher adapted the technique for a car design challenge. She presented the statements shown in the organizer below (Figure 4) before students began working on their designs. For each statement, students had to decide whether they agreed or disagreed with each statement. Then, while building and testing their cars, they used their observations from the experience to collect evidence for and against each statement. Throughout the process, students used technology such as stopwatches and online videos about car design to build a larger pool of data from which to collect more evidence.

Figure 4: Reading for Meaning Organizer for Car Design Challenge

Evidence For	Statement	Evidence Against
	The speed of the car changes on different surfaces.	
	Changing the design while using the same materials can increase the speed of the car.	
	This design task demonstrates all of Newton's Laws of Motion.	

Teachers don't have to reinvent everything they are doing to successfully integrate STEM in their classrooms. Instead, by identifying the skills they are trying to help students develop and looking for sound instructional tools and techniques that build these skills, teachers can STEM-ify their teaching strategies without overwhelming themselves or their students.

References

Boutz, A. L., Silver, H. F., Jackson, J. W., & Perini, M. J. (2012). *Tools for Thoughtful Assessment: Classroom-Ready Techniques for Improving Teaching and Learning*. Ho-Ho-Kus, NJ: Thoughtful Education Press.

Silver, H. F., Dewing, R. T., & Perini, M. J. (2012). *The Core Six: Essential Strategies for Achieving Excellence with the Common Core*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Promote critical thinking in our students.
They need the skills to be successful in life.
Have a great week!
Paul K. Smith

Click here:
Griswold 2025

The future starts today, not tomorrow.

~ Pope John Paul II