



# GRISWOLD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## Superintendent's Update – Week of November 5, 2012

Instead of complaining that the rose bush is full of thorns, be happy the thorn bush has roses.

~ Proverb

### Calendar

- **Monday-Friday, November 5-8 – The Griswold Public Schools welcome two principals from the Shandong Province of China.** Please join us in welcoming: **Mr. Yang Shichen**, Principal, Jinyi Primary School, Linzi District of Zibo and **Mr. Du Yizhi**, Principal, No. 1 Experimental Primary School, Yinan County.
- **Tuesday, November 6 – Professional Development, No School.** The day begins with a hot breakfast in the GMS cafeteria from 7:00 – 7:45 AM. The program begins at 7:45 AM in the GMS auditorium.
- **Tuesday, November 6 – Griswold Middle School Parent Conferences from 10:00 AM – Noon & 12:30 – 2:30 PM.**
- **Tuesday, November 6 – Vote!**
- **Wednesday, November 7 – “Coffee and Chat” / Superintendent’s Advisory Council in the Superintendent’s Office at GMS, 8:45 AM.** *NOTE:* The 7:30 AM early meeting has been cancelled this month. On December 5, both the 7:30 AM and 8:45 AM meetings will resume.
- **Wednesday, November 7 – Negotiations: Budget Subcommittee & GEA, 5:00 PM.**
- **Wednesday, November 7 – Building Committee in the GES Library, 6:00 PM.**
- **Wednesday, November 7 – GHS Parents Advisory Committee in the GHS Library, 7:00 PM.**
- **Friday, November 9 – Edline grade posting by all teachers in Grades 5-12.**
- **Monday, November 12 – Veterans’ Day Holiday, No School.**
- **Tuesday, November 13 – Nominations due for November Employee of the Month.** Please send all nominations to [rdrobiak@griswoldpublicschools.org](mailto:rdrobiak@griswoldpublicschools.org).
- **Tuesday, November 13 – Board of Education Meeting in the GMS Library, 6:00 PM.** Please note change of date as a result of the Veterans’ Day Holiday. During the *Public Comment* portion of the meeting teachers, staff, students, and parents will have an opportunity to make brief statements regarding budget requests for the upcoming year.
- **Wednesday, November 14 – Negotiations: Budget Subcommittee & GEA, 5:00 PM.**
- **Thursday-Friday, November 15-16 – CODE RED TRAINING for students at GMS and GHS.** As part of our preparation for the new **LOCKDOWN protocol** for the Griswold schools and campus, teachers will spend the first several minutes of each class reviewing the instructions that have been prepared in order to lockdown our classrooms, buildings, and campus in a matter of seconds. *NOTE:* CODE RED TRAINING for students at GES will take place during the first two weeks of November.
- **Thursday, November 15 – Teacher of the Year Ceremony at the Bushnell in Hartford, 5:00 PM.** Betsy Kowal will be recognized along with the other Teacher of Year recipients in this annual ceremony.
- **Friday, November 16 – Connecticut Association of Boards of Education Conference.**
- **Friday, November 16 – Author, Jake Halpern visits GMS (rescheduled from 10/23).** Halpern is the author of *Dormia* and *World’s End: The Second Book of Dormia*.
- **Wednesday, November 21 – Half Day.**



- **Wednesday, November 21 – Griswold Booster Club Pasta Dinner at the French Club, 5:30-7:00 PM.** Adults \$6.00, Children under 12 - \$3.00.
- **Thursday, November 22 – Thanksgiving, No School**
- **Thursday, November 22 – Griswold Booster Club 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Turkey Dip at Ashland Lake at the French Club.** Registration is at 7:30 AM. The jump time is 8:00 AM! Proceeds benefit all Griswold athletic programs.
- **Thursday, November 22 – Thanksgiving Football Game vs. Plainfield (Away), 10:00 AM.** A little football is a great way to begin the celebration!



## Notes

### ❖ *Take time to read before voting...*

**Visit ASCD**, developer of a new policy resource. In their inaugural issue (click to see it) they highlight the education platforms of President Barack Obama and Governor Mitt Romney. You will get a sense of each of the candidates' stances on accountability, teacher effectiveness, school funding, school choice, and college affordability. No analysis or outside commentary is included.

**Visit the Campaign Websites** and get a sense of the candidates' education views directly from the education sections of the Obama and Romney campaign websites.

**Read the transcripts from the debate.** The portion of the debate transcripts and videos (click to view) that focus on education have been compiled by the Commission on Presidential Debates and are worth a quick review.

### ❖ *SURVEY NOW ONLINE for the Griswold 2022 Project!*



**Please share your ideas in our brief survey as we prepare the schools for the year 2022.**

**The survey will be available from November 1 – 30 on the school's website: [www.griswold.k12.ct.us](http://www.griswold.k12.ct.us).**

### ***Changes in our world during the next 10 years will impact education in the Griswold Public Schools!***

Our goal as a school community is to guarantee success for all students. But in a world where change is rapid, it is necessary to evaluate every aspect of our educational programs, assess our performance in a critical manner, and dare to make the most innovative adjustments to ensure that we are truly building a school community that offers a world-class education in which every child has the opportunity to succeed at the highest competitive level. That is a vision that we as a school system are proud to promote as we welcome Griswold students in pre-Kindergarten through grade 12 through our doors each day!

## Thoughts

**Our new mission: STEP ONE - Prepare every student for college and a career. STEP TWO - Ensure they can complete college and be successful in a career.**

There was a time when our mission as educators was to make sure that our students could get into college. There was little communication or contact or connection between secondary and post-secondary institutions. The only contact came in the form of recommending our students for acceptance. However, a harsh reality has set in:

## Research completed for the class of 2004 in Connecticut, shows that 6 years after graduating from high schools

**41% completed a postsecondary degree** (at some point during the six years)

**33% enrolled** (at some point during the six years) **but had not completed a degree**

**26% had not enrolled** (at any point during the six years)

The new challenge for high schools is to make sure that our students will be college and career ready – which means that students must be academically prepared for college and beyond. In addition, students must be ready with a complete set of skills that includes perseverance, determination, and motivation.

**This new challenge cries out for a greater sense of equity in schools.**

We tend to think that we are an institution that promotes equitable opportunities for each student. But *promoting* equitable opportunities and *insisting* on equitable opportunities are two very different things.

We must ask ourselves: **Do we have different expectations for different students? If so, why do we have different expectations? If we do have different expectations, when in each student's educational career did the expectations for that student change?**

These are important questions to ask. By asking them, we begin the long road that most schools do not dare travel.

To make sure that our students survive **and thrive** after high school, *every student* must have mastered certain outcomes, must be prepared with certain skills, and must understand and have pursued the most ambitious options available to them.

As we begin the **Griswold 2022 Project**, our goal is to prepare every one of our students to be successful in their world after a Griswold education knowing that the world will be a dramatically different place than it was during their education. Help us identify those crucial outcomes and skills to ensure the success of our graduates. Please take the survey on the school's website and be an important part of this project!

### **Excellence Without Equity Is Neither** *Education Week, November 2* By Eric Witherspoon

There are many excellent public schools in the United States—schools that receive distinguished awards, produce students with perfect ACT scores, and send their graduates to elite institutions of higher education. Yet within these same schools, you can find students experiencing none of these things firsthand, many of them students of color and from low-income families. I know this because I am the superintendent of just such a school, and my school is working hard to erase these divisions.

Through the years, educators and policymakers have used many means to **address gaps in opportunity and achievement** through programs designed to support students with lower achievement histories. Many efforts have spurred gains, but nowhere near enough. To **genuinely address these issues, schools need to rethink everything they do to maintain and grow excellence while ensuring every student shares in that excellence.** Excellence without equity is in fact neither and is no longer an option.

To ensure that every student—no exceptions—experiences and benefits from an excellent education, schools need to examine deeply and attend to three key areas of support, changing and growing in each area to meet the needs of all students: the school's belief system, organizational structure, and instructional program.

**Analyze and reframe the belief system.** **For every student to succeed, everyone must believe that success for all is possible and that failure is not an option for any student.** This belief is fundamental and must be shared by every student and adult in a school. Expectations correlate directly with results.

At my school, [Evanston Township High School](#), or ETHS, which is also a stand-alone school district in Illinois, we have about 3,000 students, 41 percent of them from low-income households. Our enrollment is approximately 43

percent white, 32 percent African-American, and 17 percent Hispanic, with smaller numbers of Asian, Native American, and multiracial students.

Here, we have studied Carol Dweck's research on achievement and success and her book *Mindset* to reinforce the idea that intelligence is not fixed at birth, but can increase with effort. From this, we developed a unit of study about “effective effort” that we introduce to all freshmen. ETHS professionals also engage in what we call “courageous conversations” to explore race and institutionalized racism and grapple with how each influences our school. Beliefs and behaviors interact, and we need to be overt about understanding and addressing this as a school community.

**Rethink and retool traditional roles.** We need to analyze each job in our schools to ensure all have a role in supporting excellence and equity for every student. Principals, teachers, department chairs, and administrators need to reframe their jobs to ensure they are analyzing the curriculum and classroom instruction as they begin to define excellence. For example, deans, often seen as disciplinarians, need to become “interventionists,” seeking answers to questions like, “*Why is this student in trouble? What is going on in his or her life?*”

**Value and support professional learning.** Professional development must be ongoing, embedded in practice, and reflective of students' needs. It must be expansive and intensive, providing coaching and analysis of student data, and connected directly to instruction. We found that administrators need to learn how to use evaluation and supervision in professional development—building from classroom visits, coaching, and ongoing dialogue with teachers to support improved teaching and learning. Educators' continuous reflection on curriculum, instruction, and the impact of beliefs and expectations on student outcomes is a fundamental piece of ensuring excellence and equity.

**Develop a system of supports for all students.** The culture of achievement in schools needs to shift, and asking for support must become the norm for all students. ETHS has a tiered assistance system that includes department study centers, a writing center, support before and after school, and Saturday help, as well as individualized supports and interventions for struggling students.

**Focus on literacy.** Reading is the gateway to all learning. Literacy must be addressed in every classroom, every day—reading strategies must be an integral part of history class and math class *and* of physical and technical education. At ETHS, teachers receive training to help them implement literacy-learning strategies in everything from history and math to physical education.

**Expect more, get more.** Many schools are expecting less from some students and—with a painful impact on these students' futures—getting what they anticipated. With a past system of course placement based on 8th grade achievement tests, ETHS could predict with tragic accuracy who would populate freshman classes: White students were the majority in our most rigorous classes, and nonwhite and low-income students filled the classrooms with the least opportunity to later take honors and Advanced Placement classes. It was as if we were determining academic futures even before students took a class at ETHS.

Three years ago, after reviewing national education research and conducting our own, we restructured our freshman humanities course (which is a team-taught English and history class), consolidating it into three levels. Students reading below grade level were placed in a class with intensive literacy-development support. Students testing in the top fifth percentile were placed in an honors-only class. A majority of students were placed in a class that combined regular and honors students. These combined classes were taught the same curriculum as the honors-only class by the same teachers. Students took this course for regular or honors credit. Students in the class with lower reading scores also took a reading-support course.

This restructured program—with high-quality supports for students and teachers—was designed to encourage more students to take honors- and AP-level courses.

Based on our experience, we expanded the restructuring of the freshman year in 2011. Now, we place students with reading scores between the 40th and 99th percentiles in the same freshman humanities courses. We also ramped up the curriculum, aligning it to AP expectations, ACT college-readiness standards, and the Common Core State Standards.

And, in a profound shift, students in freshman humanities may now receive an earned honors credit, meaning they can earn honors credit based on the quality of their work throughout the semester. Previously, the honors

designation was based on placement criteria that did not take into consideration how students performed in class. The new model requires students to perform well each semester on a series of earned-honors-credit assessments. We are working now to expand the earned-honors-credit restructuring to include biology.

**Examine evaluations.** Through formal and informal, quantitative and qualitative, formative and summative evaluations, **schools must constantly analyze what they are doing and whether they are helping students.** With the support of data, schools must continually refine their work and make the adjustments necessary to ensure achievement of all students.

Achieving excellence and equity for all students is possible. It requires an honest look at beliefs, structures, practices, and a willingness to do what it takes to make change. Schools should not be daunted and must begin immediately—there are too many students who cannot wait. We can act our way to new beliefs and start to make the structural and instructional changes necessary to achieve excellence and equity. To do anything less is educational malpractice.

Every student – every day!  
Have a great week!  
Paul K. Smith



A world-class education is the single most important factor in determining not just whether our kids can compete for the best jobs but whether America can out-compete countries around the world.

*~ Barack Obama*

Education is the investment our generation makes in the future.

*~ Mitt Romney*

