

Gwinn Area Community Schools

Modeltowners News

January, 2012

Volume 11, Issue 1

Dear Families,

Happy New Year! Monday, January 1, 2012, was the start of a new chapter for all of us. I am excited to be your Superintendent, and I look forward to continuing to provide leadership of the highest regard. I sincerely appreciate the support shown, and have valued the opportunity I had been given to help make this mid-year transition a smooth one.

My goals as your new Superintendent are very simple, but will help provide a clear vision of where we all believe Gwinn Area Community Schools can improve. First and foremost I would like to see student achievement increase. With the extremely talented and dedicated staff we have this goal is more than attainable. I also believe we can improve our percentage of students graduating in four years if we concentrate our support in the appropriate areas; and finally, I plan to increase more stakeholder involvement by forming a Community Advisory Committee to meet at least quarterly to discuss issues directly related to our school and community. Please look for more information about joining this important committee in the near future. I encourage and invite all parents and community members to join in the quest to move GACS from GOOD to GREAT!

As you are well aware Gwinn Area Community Schools is faced with budget woes, but clearly this is something that can be worked through with faith, a plan of action and stakeholders working together with a defined purpose. We must work smarter, not harder, to get the results intended. It becomes increasingly difficult to continue to provide the quality education we strive for when the financial support is not there, but we must remain committed and work together to find that balance without losing sight of what is really important. I hope you are as ready for the challenge as I am!

This newsletter contains information about the changes in the MEAP cut scores and what the impact will be on Gwinn's percentage of students who were found to be Advanced or Proficient on the Fall 2011 MEAP tests taken in October. I must warn you that the results will be very disappointing, if not shocking. For example, 3rd grade math scores that were once showing 95% of students proficient are projected to fall to 35%. It is also estimated that over 65% of Michigan schools will not meet Adequate Yearly Progress this year. According to the state, the purpose of increasing the cut scores was to "better reflect how well schools are preparing their students to be on-track for career- and college-readiness in high school, and on-track to proficiency in the next grade for grades 3-9." When the scores are released to the public, please know that they are in **no way** indicative of the quality of teachers or programs we have in Gwinn. The previous cut scores were extremely low, and all schools are going to see a decline. We will continue to improve by analyzing the data and making curricular/program changes as necessary. Our students deserve the best, therefore, we will move forward future-focused and results driven!

Parent and community engagement is vital to the success of the District. I am asking all parents, residents, and business and community members to ensure the success of all Gwinn students. Our students are in need of your support, and I look forward to all stakeholders partnering with the District to provide the support and services our students deserve. My door is always open. Please feel free to visit, call, or email me at any time. As stakeholders, your input is valued; therefore I anticipate and welcome your engagement. Our students DO deserve the best. I look forward to taking this journey together.

Respectfully,

Kim VanDrese
Superintendent

ADOLESCENT HEALTH CLINIC OPENS

On October 1st Gwinn School District in partnership with the Marquette County Health Department opened an on-site adolescent health clinic. The clinic is open Monday through Friday from 7:30 a.m. until 3:30 p.m., and is located on the high school side of the combined high school - middle school building, just down the hall from the Guidance Office.

Staffed by a Nurse Practitioner and Social Worker, services available include: immunizations; care for minor or acute illnesses and injuries; coordinated care with your physician for chronic illnesses such as asthma, diabetes, ADHD or allergies; sports physicals; referrals to other community resources; assistance with mental health issues; smoking cessation and weight management; and assisting families with applying for Medicaid.

The overall goal is to support a positive school environment and develop healthier, more responsive students by reducing negative health behaviors while increasing healthy behaviors. Student Council representatives are currently working on naming the center and designing a logo for it.

If students are under the age of 18, they must have a consent form signed by their parent or legal guardian to receive care. Birth control pills or devices and abortion counseling services will NOT be provided through the clinic.

Charges for services are based on a sliding fee scale. Services may be billed to health insurances, however, no one will be refused services if they cannot pay.

The clinic is funded in part by a grant from the Michigan Departments of Education and Community Health. For more information, or to schedule an appointment, please call 346-9247, ext. 2360.

GWINN MIDDLE SCHOOL NETBOOK INITIATIVE UPDATE

GMS students received their Netbooks during the week of October 24, 2011. The GACS Technology Support Staff worked diligently to prepare all equipment necessary to take on this exciting initiative, including converting GMS/GHS to wireless! Teachers have reported great success with having the ability to put technology at our students' fingertips. While there will always be glitches that need to be worked out with any program, and especially with technology, teachers at GMS are enjoying tremendous benefits, and it is transforming the way teachers teach and students learn almost daily.

The staff has found that the Netbooks have been a great way to go paperless, saying that most things that would be copied and distributed are now posted on Moodle for instant access. Educational websites that were once only accessible to three or four students at a time depending upon the number of classroom computers are now readily available to everyone at the same time. Communicating with students has also become easier than ever AND available 24/7 through the staff/student email access. Students can get clarification on assignments, and staff can advise students whenever they have questions. The students now can do more self-directed learning, while the content expert (teacher) focuses student attention on the important themes and content, guides them and directs them in a whole new way of teaching.

"The technology that we've been able to put into the hands of students who are struggling/at-risk is the most exciting to me. Students who struggle with reading comprehension are having software installed that will EASILY read what's on the screen." says one GMS teacher. The Netbooks have truly made a difference in teaching and learning at GMS.



ASBESTOS CONTAINING BUILDING MATERIALS

In accordance with EPA regulations, the buildings of the Gwinn Area Community Schools have been inspected for asbestos on a regular basis. Asbestos containing building materials are present in district facilities. Location, condition and complete descriptions are included in the district's Asbestos Management Plan, which is available for your review upon request. The plan is located in the Central Office; please see Brenda Kurian if you wish to review the document.

Asbestos containing building material in the district is primarily in the form of pipe insulation and floor tile. Building maintenance personnel receive appropriate training regarding asbestos identification, location and maintenance.

The required 3-year re-inspection and Asbestos Management Plan update was completed in November, 2001 by Fortress Environmental.

ONE CALL NOW SYSTEM

All GACS students recently received a letter explaining the District's new automated system designed to alert parents to snow days, lunch balances, absences and much more. We are excited to be able to offer this service to our families.

Please check out the ONE CALL NOW link on the District webpage at www.gwinn.k12.mi.us. You may update and/or make changes to your information at any time at this site. In the event of a snow day, the system will call the phone number designated letting you know that school has been canceled or delayed.

Please make sure your information is accurate so you can benefit from the service!

NOTICE TO PARENTS REGARDING TITLE 1—NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

Parents of students attending the Gwinn Area Community Schools have the right to know the professional qualifications of the classroom teachers who instruct their children. Federal law allows parents to request certain information about classroom teachers and requires public school districts to provide this information in a timely manner, if requested. Specifically, parents have the right to ask for the following information about each classroom teacher:

- Whether the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) has licensed or qualified the teacher for the grade and subject he/she teaches.
- Whether the MDE has decided that the teacher can teach in a classroom without being licensed or qualified under state regulations because of special circumstances.
- The teacher's college major; whether the teacher has any advanced degrees, and if so, the subject of the degrees.
- Whether any instructional aide in the Title I program provides services to a child and, if they do, the aide's qualifications.

This rule applies to students attending George D. Gilbert and KI Sawyer Elementary Schools.

Please contact Kristen Peterson at 346-0314 to request any of this information.

FREQUENTLY CALLED NUMBERS

Bus Garage/Transportation	346-3914
George D. Gilbert Elementary School	346-5726
Gwinn High School	346-9247
Gwinn High School—Attendance	346-4895
Gwinn High School—Guidance	346-0310
Athletic Director	346-5914
Food Service Director	346-0313
Gwinn Middle School	346-5914
KI Sawyer Elementary School	346-5567
Special Education Office	346-0314
Superintendent's Office	346-9283



**CLIP THIS FOR
FUTURE REFERENCE**



PESTICIDE ADVISORY TO ALL PARENTS/STUDENTS/EMPLOYEES

As a part of the Gwinn Area Community School District's pest management program, pesticides are occasionally applied. You have the right to be informed prior to any pesticide application made to the school grounds and buildings. Pesticide application in all District buildings will take place on the 3rd Saturday of each month. In certain emergencies, pesticides may be applied without prior notice, but you will be provided notice following any such application. Notice of pesticide application will be posted in the Principal's Office and employee lounges.

“PROFICIENCY” ON STATE REQUIRED TESTS HAS A NEW DEFINITION

Gwinn Area Community Schools is taking a proactive approach to communicating with parents and the community concerning scoring changes to the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) and Michigan Merit Exam (MME) tests this year.

Each year, Gwinn students along with all other Michigan public school students in grades 3-9 are required to take the MEAP and eleventh graders are required to take the MME. If you haven't already, you will soon begin hearing news reports about new cutoff scores, or “cut scores” that the Michigan State Board of Education recently adopted for these tests. Rather than rely on the news media, we encourage parents to use GACS and the Michigan Department of Education for the most accurate and current information.

So, what are cut scores and why has the Michigan State Board of Education changed them? MEAP and MME cut scores separate test takers into various categories, such as advanced, proficient, partially proficient and not proficient. Michigan's previous cut scores for these state tests were set at a very basic level. Raising the cut scores will give Michigan parents and students a much better sense of whether they are adequately prepared for the next step in their education and a future career in a global economy.

The new cut scores represent a significantly higher standard for student achievement and are intended to more accurately reflect a student's progress toward college and career readiness. On some tests, students previously could have answered as few as 40 percent of the questions correctly to be considered proficient. Under the new scoring system, students will have to correctly answer a much higher percentage of questions. Michigan is one of only three states in the nation (along with New York and Tennessee) to move to this top tier level of test scoring.

Like school districts across the state, Gwinn's MEAP and MME proficiency results are expected to decline when publicly released next spring. While we anticipate an initial drop in the number of students reported as “proficient,” we are confident this change will be temporary due to ongoing school improvement efforts and student support.

If a student is reported as “not proficient,” it does not mean that he or she isn't gaining academic skills or knowledge expected for his or her grade level. It means that on the day of the test, this student was not **yet** proficient on the material being tested. Many students may require additional help and/or time to master these skills. Actually, by the time parents and the school receive the MEAP/MME results from the state, many students identified as “not proficient” will have closed the gap.

The MEAP and MME tests are only two of several measures used in our district throughout the year to insure that students are making academic progress. We maintain high standards for our students and their test scores are consistently among the highest in the state. We anticipate this trend will continue even with the new cut scores.

We will be examining our curriculum to respond to this more challenging level of test scoring. In addition, our staff will focus our professional development efforts on enhancing our abilities to rise to the challenge presented to these recent changes.

Undoubtedly, parents will have many questions about the scoring changes as we do. We will continue to provide as much information as we can as it continues to be disseminated to us.

5 THINGS PARENTS NEED TO KNOW A NEW DEFINITION OF PROFICIENT ON STATE REQUIRED TESTS

1. Each year, public school students in grades 3-9 take the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) test and 11th graders take the Michigan Merit Exam (MME).
2. The Michigan State Board of Education recently approved new MEAP and MME “cut scores” for Mathematics, Reading, Science and Social Studies. A cut score is the score that separates test takers into various categories, such as advanced, proficient, partially proficient and not proficient.
3. The new cut scores are higher and “raise the bar” for our students. They are intended to be a better measure of student progress toward being career and college ready.
4. While we anticipate an initial decline in the number of students reported as “proficient,” we are confident this change will be temporary due to ongoing school improvement efforts and student support.
5. If your student is reported as “not proficient,” it does not mean that your student isn't gaining academic skills or is falling behind. It means that on the day of the test, your student was not **yet** proficient on the material being tested. Several other measures are used in our district throughout the year to insure that your student is making academic progress.

FACTS ABOUT MICHIGAN'S NEW "CUT SCORES"

What are the MEAP and MME Tests?

Each year, public school students in grades 3-9 are required by the state of Michigan to take the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) test. Students are tested in Mathematics, Reading, Writing, Science and Social Studies. Eleventh graders take the Michigan Merit Exam (MME). The MME assesses students in English Language Arts (reading and writing), Mathematics, Science and Social Studies. These tests assess students' learning to ensure they are on track to be college and career ready.

What does "proficient" mean?

Students who meet or exceed standards on the MEAP and MME meet Michigan's definition of proficient.

What does "college and career readiness" mean?

The term "college readiness" indicates a student is ready to succeed in first-semester, credit-bearing college courses. The term "career readiness" indicates a student is ready to succeed in introductory technical career training courses.

What are MEAP and MME "cut scores"?

Cut scores (or cutoff scores) separate test takers into various categories, such as advanced, proficient, partially proficient and not proficient. MEAP and MME cut scores and categories are determined by the Michigan Department of Education and approved by the Michigan State Board of Education.

Why is Michigan changing the MEAP and MME cut scores?

Michigan's previous cut scores for these state tests were set at a very basic level. Raising the cut scores will give Michigan parents and students a much better sense of whether students are adequately prepared for the next step in their education and a future career in a global economy. Michigan is one of only three states in the nation (along with New York and Tennessee) to move to this top tier level of test scoring.

How do the new scores compare to last year's scores?

The new cut scores represent a significantly higher standard for student achievement and are intended to more accurately reflect whether students are on track and prepared for college and careers. On some tests, students previously could have answered as few as 40 percent of the questions correctly to be considered proficient. Under the new scoring system, students will have to correctly answer a much higher percentage of questions. While we anticipate an initial decline in the number of students reported as "proficient," we are confident this change will be temporary due to ongoing school improvement efforts and student support.

Should parents be concerned if their child's proficiency level drops?

Parents may notice their child is not at the same proficiency level as previous years. A lower score does not mean that a child isn't gaining academic skills or is falling behind, but it is a reflection of higher standards. If a child does not score at or above the proficient level on any of the assessments, this is an indication that, on the day of the test, the child had not yet mastered the skills or knowledge expected for his or her grade level. Many students might require additional help and/or time to master these skills. Actually, by the time parents and the school receive the results from the state, many students will have closed the gap. Parents may wish to talk to their child's teacher(s) about the results and the resources that can help ensure his or her success.

What is Gwinn Area Community Schools doing to help students become college and career ready?

In addition to the MEAP and MME reports, several other measures are used in our district throughout the year to insure students are making academic progress. Attendance, classroom participation and class work also help determine whether students are ready to advance to the next grade. For students that may need additional assistance, we provide after school tutoring at all levels. All buildings also provide additional tutoring before school and during lunch if needed. All GACS teachers have been working diligently on determining their STUDENT GROWTH GOALS for the year, and through this process are implementing pre and post tests which will also assist staff in identifying students who may need more intensive interventions early in the school year.

We are in the process of analyzing our curriculum to respond to this more challenging level of test scoring, and we will be looking at any professional development that is needed to enhance staff training related to these recent changes.

What can parents do to help their child become college and career ready?

One of the best ways to keep track of a child's school progress is speaking with his or her teacher and the school. Parents should work with their child on homework, read assignments with him or her, and be active in their school life.


Where can more information about MEAP and MME be found?

For more information, visit www.oaisd.org/statetests or <http://1.usa.gov/statetests>.

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GWINN, MI

Gwinn Area Community Schools
50 West M-35
Gwinn, MI 49841



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Gwinn Area Community Schools Important 2012 Dates

- January 20**
Teacher Work Day—NO SCHOOL
End of 1st Semester
- February 3**
Prof. Dev. Day—NO SCHOOL
- February 21-23**
Parent/Teacher Conferences
Feb. 21 (Evening Conf.—All Schools)
(MS Conferences are by appointment only)
Feb. 22 (Evening Conf.—All Schools)
Feb. 23 NO SCHOOL
(Prof. Dev. in A.M.—Teachers)
(Afternoon Conf.—All Schools)
- February 24**
NO SCHOOL
- March 23**
End of 3rd Marking Period—FULL DAY of Classes
- April 2-9**
Easter Break
- May 27**
Graduation
- May 28**
Memorial Day—NO SCHOOL
- June 1**
Last Day of School
- June 4**
Teacher Work Day—NO SCHOOL

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