

GOVERNOR MOREHEAD SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND



SEPTEMBER 2020

Newsletter

PRINCIPAL'S MESSAGE:

Greetings,

And we are off, speeding into the new 2020-2021 school year just like the high-speed internet we all heavily rely on these days. Thank you to all our students, families, and community members for your support, patience, and flexibility as we start this school year working and learning remotely for the first time in GMS history. Thank you teachers and staff, for your unwavering efforts in shifting all your instructional practices, classroom management skills, resources, and materials to meet these new demands and unique challenges. Everyone has been working tirelessly to learn new technologies, understand new policies and procedures, and understand the shifting and current needs of our students. A big thank you to everyone who prepared, organized, delivered, and received equipment. Over 100 pieces of equipment were inventoried, assigned, and delivered. This all has been a tremendous undertaking for everyone involved, thank you. We also appreciate the support our families are providing for our students in this new learning environment. We understand none of this is easy, but together we are resilient and will persevere.

On Friday, August 21, we celebrated the start of the school year with our guest speaker. Lex Gillette is the current world record holder in the long jump, a four-time Paralympic medalist, a three-time long jump world champion, and an 18-time national champion from Raleigh North Carolina. In his youth, he attended GMS programs. Lex shared our theme for the year which is "Resiliency-Determination-Empowerment". Getting all our equipment out, working through technical issues, learning from home, adjusting our work schedules, are all amazing demonstration of resiliency.

As we continue, we will need to become even more determined to keep pace with the learning, continue to problem solve personal and technical challenges, and take care of each other and ourselves. By the end of this school year, the amount of personal growth in our knowledge, skills, and resiliency will empower us to achieve our highest levels of success. Lex Gillette communicated this message through his example of being a world-class athlete in the long jump. He attributes his accomplishments to his resiliency he learned growing up and losing his sight, and the support of his mother and teachers along the way. His determination brought him to world records, Paralympic medals, national and world championship titles. He is now empowered to keep training for the next Paralympic games as well as share a message to others to keep pushing towards excellence and to not be afraid to "Fly" which is the title of his book.

Throughout the summer, we have been preparing our building for the safe return of staff and students. We have also been developing safety protocols and toolkits that will help guide and inform all community members on what returning to school might look like. This information will be shared as we get closer to knowing if students will be returning as this information consistently changes based on new data and protocols from the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

We look forward to a great school year regardless of where we are. In these short few weeks, our student enthusiasm for learning is apparent as well as the determination and commitment of our staff to deliver instruction. It is these qualities that make GMS special and will allow us to have a successful school year.

Sincerely,
Matthew Mescall

STAFF UPDATES:

Braille Teacher

Please join me as we welcome Grace Minter as our new Braille Teacher!

Grace is a recent graduate and valedictorian of Mid-Atlantic Christian University where she earned a degree in Elementary Education. She is the recipient of the Barbara A. Williams Award for Excellence in Teacher Education and is a Theta Alpha Kappa, National Honor Society Member. She specializes in literacy development and guided reading instruction. Grace is fluent in literary braille and a competent user of digital braille technology. She is also enrolled in North Carolina Central University's Teacher of the Visionally Impaired M.Ed. program for the Fall. Welcome to the team Grace!

School Psychologist

We are pleased to welcome Mr. David Oren to the GMS team as our full time School Psychologist. Mr. Oren is available to all our students. We are excited for his expertise in mental health, learning, and behavior, to help our students succeed academically, socially, behaviorally, and emotionally. Mr. Oren can be contacted throughout the week to address any mental health questions, or concerns our students, families, or staff may have especially as it relates to the global pandemic. David has 5 years of experience as a licensed school psychologist in a specially designed school for students with disabilities in New York, NY. At that school, he assumed leadership roles and took initiative to deliver individualized therapeutic service and worked collaboratively with colleagues to mediate student conflict.

Elementary Teacher

Welcome Sharon Ruebesam as our new elementary teacher! Sharon is a National Board-Certified teacher with 20 years' experience including 15 years in Wake County Public Schools as an EC teacher working with students who were Deaf and visually impaired. She worked at the Governor Morehead School for the Blind as a long-term substitute teacher last school year. Welcome!

Ms. Janet Perez has taken a position with the Division of Services for the Blind next door and will continue to be a strong member of the GMS community. We are thankful for all Ms. Perez has been able to accomplish at GMS and she will be missed. Staff was able to meet virtually to celebrate Ms. Perez and her new endeavors. We look forward to the opportunity to the ability to continue our work together as students transition to DSB.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR STAFF

On Monday, September 21, 2020, all GMS educators and residential staff will be attending a remote professional development on the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) from 1:00-3:00 pm. As a result, office hours and instructional time may need to be rescheduled.

The ECC is at the heart of all instruction here at GMS throughout all programs. The ECC includes concepts and skills that require specialized instruction with students who are blind or visually impaired to compensate for decreased opportunities to learn incidentally by observing others. There are nine areas of the ECC - Assistive Technology, Career Education, Compensatory Skills, Independent Living Skills, Orientation and Mobility, Recreation and Leisure, Self-Determination, Sensory Efficiency, and Social Interaction Skills. When your child attends GMS, we strive to immerse our students in these core areas in all instructional, non-instructional, and residential learning opportunities.



Photo Description: Circle of puzzle pieces with core academics in middle and ECC components around the outside

CAMPUS UPDATES

Staff have been encouraged to work from home, as they can, due to North Carolina remaining in Phase 2 of the COVID responses. As staff come in to prepare materials, they are required to be screened at the front entrance for COVID-19 symptoms, wearing a mask, and keep social distancing. They have prepared classrooms to maximize social distancing. Our hallways are marked for six feet apart and plexiglass and shields are in place. The national guard helped deliver our Personal Protective Equipment that will help keep staff safe while working in our school buildings. We continue to improve our facilities as required by DHHS and CDC as updates are reported. A big thanks goes to our housekeepers and maintenance for all their hard work cleaning and preparing our campus to keep us all safe.



Photo Description: Left- Front lobby with plexiglass and social distancing markers. Middle- hallway marked for one-way travel and 6 feet social distancing. Right- Classroom with desks spread 6 feet apart.



Photo Description: Left- Mr. Bill and Mr. Brian from housekeeping holding a "Back to School" sign. Middle- National Guard Vehicle outside Lineberry delivering PPE. Right- Ms. Latimer with mask on and holding "Back to School" sign.

GMS has installed a new Proxy Card Security System that allows our Lineberry building to be secure. Staff will have swipe card access to identified doors. Visitors and community members will be asked to ring the bell at the front door to sign in before coming to Lineberry during the school day. This added measure of security is part of GMS's efforts for ensuring the safety and security of all.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Attendance in a remote instruction environment is designed to keep students engaged, ensure they are on pace, and offer academic and emotional support. Daily attendance will be taken in each class. A student is considered present for daily attendance during a remote learning day:

- If a student completes their daily assignments, either online or offline; and/or

- If a student has a daily check-in, a two-way communication with each course teacher as scheduled. Students are required to attend classes.

If students cannot attend a class, they must communicate that with their teachers and complete any assignments that day to be counted as “present” for the day. Courses will be graded, and students will earn grades through daily classwork and engagement, projects, quizzes, and tests to earn credit for the course. Please see our updated “Remote Learning Attendance Policy.”

GMS Remote Learning Attendance Policy

North Carolina law requires students to attend school at all times. If students are in a remote learning setting, daily attendance is required. Attendance will be kept in each remote learning class. Students who are present in a virtual meeting or phone call will be marked as present. Students must attend at least 50% of classes each day to be marked as present for daily attendance.

To be marked present in a class, a student must:

- Engage and participate in a virtual meeting or phone call.
- If a student cannot engage in a virtual meeting or phone call, the teacher must be notified, and students must complete the instructional materials and/or assignments with evidence* within 14 days of the missed class.
 - *Evidence of a student completing that work on that day will be needed to count towards daily attendance for the student.
 - Evidence of work that day can be discussing lesson outcomes with the teacher or staff, turning in assignments on that day, the Canvas program reporting that the student logged in and there was engagement in content.

If a student misses 2 or more classes in a day, the student will be **marked as “unexcused absent” for that day**. Absences from school can be excused only when a child is ill, when a family emergency exists, for a medical or dental appointment, and religious observances with prior approval from the administration. **The school requires a written note, email, or recorded message from the parent/guardian or a medical professional explaining reasons for student absences to be counted as “excused”**.

Students must attend school a minimum of 160 days during the school year to receive credit and be promoted. A student may not receive credit for a given semester if he/she misses more than 10 days.

The Principal has the authority to set aside this rule in cases of extreme hardship. Parents will need to schedule a conference with the Principal or write a detailed explanation of the extreme hardship for this to be considered by the Principal.

Consequences:

- **Four (4) tardies will result in one unexcused absence.**
 - **A zero** will be given to students who do not complete or make-up homework, quizzes, tests, or projects. If a student makes up this work, full credit can be received at the teacher’s discretion.
- **If there are six (6) unexcused absences** in a school year, the family will be contacted by the principal and/or the GMS Social Worker to support families in addressing absenteeism.
- **If there are ten (10) absences during a semester**, a parent-student-principal conference will be requested.
 - After 10 accumulated absences in a semester course or 20 absences for yearlong courses, the student may not receive credit for the course and may need to take the course again. The School Director and School Principal will have the authority to waive that decision based on an individual review of the student’s excessive absences.
 - After 10 accumulated unexcused absences, the IEP Team, including the parent, will reconvene to review and revise the student’s IEP, as appropriate.

PARENT MEETING

Please join us for a [Parent Community Forum on September 9 at 6:30 PM](#).

This is an opportunity to share with us your feedback, successes, challenges, and to build supports and relationships with each other. This event will take place on Microsoft Teams. Anyone with the link can join the meeting from any device (downloading the Teams software may be required). We look forward to seeing you.

Link to meeting: https://teams.microsoft.com/l/meetup-join/19%3ameeting_ZDhIODQ5ZTktZTJlYy00NmJmLTgzMDYtOGZjYmUyMTU0MTU0%40thread.v2/0?context=%7b%22Tid%22%3a%22849e9c61-f0bb-4d83-ba5f-4b5337664cf7%22%2c%22Oid%22%3a%2293561bf5-57b3-4056-85a3-c4cf12a774be%22%7d

Please Join us
September 9th at
6:30 PM for a:
**Parent Community
Forum**

Use this link to Join via Microsoft
Team:

[TEAMS LINK TO PARENT COMMUNITY
MEETING](#)

https://teams.microsoft.com/l/meetup-join/19%3ameeting_ZDhIODQ5ZTktZTJlYy00NmJmLTgzMDYtOGZjYmUyMTU0MTU0%40thread.v2/0?context=%7b%22Tid%22%3a%22849e9c61-f0bb-4d83-ba5f-4b5337664cf7%22%2c%22Oid%22%3a%2293561bf5-57b3-4056-85a3-c4cf12a774be%22%7d



HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE MEETING

This year's first HRC Meeting will be held on Thursday, September 10, 2020 at 5:30 PM.

Parents/Guardians, if you and/or your child are interested in attending, please contact Social Worker, Shonny Williams, 984.292.3033, shonika.williams@esdb.dpi.nc.gov.

You are invited to attend our **Human Rights Committee** meetings at the Governor Morehead School. The purpose of these meetings is to review and examine programs and procedures related to student rights, safety, security, and quality of life. Most residential schools have established HRC for this purpose. Directive Number 73 formalizes the requirement that all residential schools maintain HRC and sets our guidelines for their composition and operation.

Members of the HRC should include **parents/relatives of students**, present/former students, an attorney, a psychologist/psychiatrist, and representatives from the community, including private and public sectors.

HRC meets once a quarter and adheres to confidentiality requirements and policy, especially with respect to protection of student and family rights. The dates of the meetings are Sept 10, Nov 12, Jan 14, Mar 11, and May 13.

On Sept 10 at 5:30 PM, this will be a conference call.

Please contact me, Shonny Williams, 984.292.3033, or by email, shonika.williams@esdb.dpi.nc.gov, if you would like to attend.