



GULF SHORES

CITY SCHOOLS

Superintendent's Update

The first semester of the school year has flown by. I would like to take this opportunity to review our accomplishments and share future plans for the second semester and next school year. When the Board of Education was preparing for the opening of Gulf Shores City Schools, one of the main priorities was to establish Core Values that were aligned to the community's expectations for our schools. As we work to improve and expand our instructional program the Core Values should help guide our decisions. The Core Values are listed below.

We believe in:

- Promoting rigorous, comprehensive, and relevant curriculum that prepares students to become productive citizens and lifelong learners.
- Developing self-reliance by incorporating the student's physical, mental, emotional and social well-being into the teaching/learning environment.
- Fostering inclusive, engaging members of society, and encouraging critical and creative thinking.
- Recruiting and emboldening the best and the brightest faculty and staff and rewarding innovation and collaboration.
- Instilling a sense of pride in our schools by engaging the Gulf Shores community in the educational experience.

Curriculum Improvements and Additions

There have been numerous curriculum enhancements along with new classes added at our three schools. The year began with new reading textbooks in grades K-5. In discussions with our elementary teachers, we learned that the lack of a cohesive curriculum in reading was one of the top concerns. Thanks to financial support from the City of Gulf Shores, we were able to quickly go through the adoption process over the summer and start school with new textbooks and an enhanced reading curriculum in place. We also purchased a new textbook series for Language Arts in grade 6-12. The new series is aligned to College Board standards that will increase the rigor in the secondary grades.

In addition to our focus on reading and language arts, we have made improvements in math and science. At the middle school, for the first time, we began offering Algebra I to 7th grade students. This will allow those students to take Geometry in the 8th grade and put them on track to take Calculus in high school. We will begin offering an accelerated 5th grade math class at the beginning of the 2nd semester. Our 8th grade science classes have been revised to include



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STEM objectives and activities. We feel that adding more hands-on experiences improves our students understanding of physical science. At GSHS, we have revised our Ecology class to

focus more on our local environment. In the new class, Gulf Coast Ecology, students are participating in research with university professors by analyzing the water quality in Little Lagoon and working with the Little Lagoon Preservation Society to harvest oysters. Check out the video that documents students' learning experiences (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XnVClOsp_el&t=1s). Sports Medicine classes were also added at the high school this year. We are looking forward to expanding these and other opportunities as we move forward.

We are also excited to have begun providing Spanish classes to our elementary students. The classes are being taught by Mrs. Deborah Whetstone and her high school students. Just as Gulf Coast Ecology allows our high school students to connect with our community, a revised 4th grade social studies class is providing a similar opportunity. The class is focusing on the history of Gulf Shores. Students are working with a videographer from the University of South Alabama to document their research. Students will interview local residents to learn more about the history of our city. Look for their final product in the spring.

One of our goals is to focus on the development of the whole child. I am proud that we have been able to expand our Fine Arts curriculum. We are offering choir classes for middle school students and have implemented a Choral Arts program at the high school level. Additionally, a drama department has been created at the high school. If you missed the recent production of Alice in Wonderland, you missed a treat!

Coming Soon

Next year, we will begin offering Geometry to 8th grade students who are successful in 7th grade Algebra I. We will also continue to examine ways to personalize learning. In other words, we want to meet students at their academic level, not just their grade level.

At the high school, we will begin offering Aviation classes in the 20-21 school year. We have received a grant from AOPA (Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association) that provides curriculum and training to begin offering four aviation classes (9th-12th grade). Our plan is to offer the 9th and 10th grade classes next school year. Ultimately, a student who progresses through all four years of classes would have the opportunity to complete the ground test for airplane or drone pilots and proceed to flight training. Additionally, we are planning on curriculum enhancements at the high school related to STEM and humanities.



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Expansion of the School Day

The school system received a 21st Century Learning grant to provide after-school learning activities for our students. The new program at GSMS is called “Beyond the Bell.” There is no cost for students to attend the program. Activities include eSports, Rocketry, Visual Arts, Culinary, Martial Arts, STEM, Fitness, and Spanish. The summer program will build on our partnership with the Gulf Coast Center for Ecotourism and Sustainability.

I hope that you can see how we are working to align our instructional program to the Core Values that were identified by the Board.

Community Support

The Dolphin Foundation for Education and Arts has provided tremendous support to our schools. Currently, there are 34 teachers who are working on National Board Certification. Only 4% of teachers across the country have earned the certification. Earning National Board Certification has proven to have a positive impact on student achievement. DFEA has also provided grants to the GSHS Band, Cross Country teams, and the Turbo Dolphins Greenpower Team. Currently, DFEA is raising funds for STEAM labs in the middle and high schools and a music lab at GSHS. To learn more about DFEA and to donate, visit their website at www.thegsdf.org.

The Erie Hall Meyer Charitable Fund recently provided a generous grant to Gulf Shores City Schools to help purchase 900 MacBooks for GSHS students. MacBooks will be distributed to the students after returning from Christmas break. We believe these tools will enhance student creativity and collaboration between students and teachers. We will begin evaluating devices that are aligned to the curriculum needs at the middle and elementary schools during the second semester. Plans call for an upgrade of devices at those two schools for the 2020-21 school year.

It's All About Culture...

A couple of months ago, I was honored to be invited as part of an Alabama Delegation to visit South Korea to learn more about their educational system. South Korea's students regularly score among the highest in the world on standardized tests. We visited schools and spoke with teachers, students, and parents. We also met with many of their national educational leaders along with university administrators and professors. I gained many interesting insights into the Korean education system and the social values of their citizens.



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As you might expect, the classroom environment in Korea was sometimes intense and the focus on rigorous instruction was obvious. What might be a surprise is that Korean education officials and parents were very concerned about developing the whole child. We saw a focus on fine arts, foreign languages, and extracurricular activities. In one of the middle schools that we visited, the administration was committed to offering more electives and “free classes” in which students did not earn a grade, but could choose to participate in a “fun” elective.

My big takeaway from the Korean educational system is that the culture of the Korean community has the greatest impact on schools and student success. Parents are committed to the academic success of their children and education is the top priority. The expectation of parents and educators is that all children can and will exceed at a high level. In many ways, the

Gulf Shores community has the same culture in place. Our school system was formed because we are committed to a better education for our kids. We must continue to build on that desire and raise expectations while staying committed to wanting the best for our children.

Thanks for allowing us the honor of educating your students. We look forward to exciting and productive times ahead.