



# State of the School 2024

## Notes from Dr. Horner

### Programs

Last year, after an extensive review of various Learning Management Systems by a review team of people from all three divisions, we decided that the wisest move would be to focus more heavily on our **Google Classrooms platform** as the primary communication vehicle between home and school about classroom related items.

Special thanks to Tammy Burrows, Marsha Jordan, Jackie Drew, Laura Reed, Mandi Savage, and Lynne Tweedie for their extensive research. Their consideration of many different possibilities helped us rethink how we use our learning management systems.

As a side note, if you have not designated someone in your family to receive either daily—or weekly—updates in Google Classroom, please do so today. This is an important vehicle for partnering between home and school.

In 2024, the Bible department, led by Cliff McNeely, conducted a two-day, in-house retreat to review the scope and sequence of all their courses from 6th through 12th grade. Additionally, they considered the merits of a prototype “Career and Calling” program then under development by Jamie Garner. During that meeting, the Bible department embraced the potential of this program to enhance the existing curricula and therefore cleared space on a monthly basis in their courses. By doing so, they enabled our high school students to engage in meaningful conversations and personal reflections on who God has made them to be and what their calling in life might be. For example, as part of this program, ninth grade students were charged with scheduling and conducting interviews with various faculty and staff across this campus to learn more about how our Christian faith informs and influences our work and then to report back on their interviews.

On a personal note...I would like to commend the diligent, thoughtful, deeply meaningful work that **Jamie Garner** has done in building this program and in scaling it, to develop our students for years to come. Her work serves as a good reminder to us all that our children’s identity is given to them by God, it is not something merely

conferred by culture. I encourage you all to find ways to engage with your students about how God's vision for their lives matters deeply.

## **People**

In May 2024, we celebrated the 25th commencement exercises in GFCS History.

Class of 2024 Highlights:

- 82 students graduated (11 Alpha-Omega students)
- 11,751 hours of community service cumulatively over 4 years.
- 68% worked part-time jobs
- Average Submitted ACT Composite Score: 27.8
- 24 AP Scholars; 12 with distinction - the highest level
- Scholarship offers total: \$13,651,364
- Attending 32 different colleges in 14 states
- 5 Students playing sports at the next level
- School attained overall AP Gold Honor Roll

2024 Athletic Highlights

- 269 students participated in 18 different teams
- Inaugural season of 6th grade football
- First Team All-District: 33
- First Team All-State: 11
- Academic All-State: 34
- State Champions in Girl's Doubles Tennis

2024 Creative Arts Highlights

- State Runner-Up - Drumline, 2024; Best Front Ensemble
- 7 All State High School Choir selections; 2 All State JH Choir selections
- 3 All State Dance Honorees
- 21 JH selectees for "Celebrating Art" publication
- VASE - 76 Regional Gold medals, HS Art; 11 Regional Gold Medals - HS Digital Art
- Schmidt and Jones Awards for Wizard of Oz
  - Nominees, Best Actor; Best Male Ensemble Member; Best Actress in a Minor Role; Best Actor in Minor Role

2024 Faculty Advancements

- In-progress Master's degrees - Missy Bohne, Jamie Garner
- Completed Master's degrees - Colin Roe, Ayleen Galvez
- In-progress Doctoral degrees - Jackson Greer, Jason Worsley, Cliff McNeely

## **Plans - 3 Significant Initiatives**

### **Accreditation**

Last year, we shared that GFCS would be changing accreditors from ACSI-Cognia to CESA-Cognia. We made that move last year and became a candidate school with CESA. Regardless of the name of our lead accrediting body, we have and will continue to maintain accreditation through Cognia. We spent much of the summer and fall gathering the needed information to write the CESA Institutional Report. We submitted that report to the visiting team on January 6 of this year. Our Institutional Review visit will occur March 2-4.

### **Veracross**

We also shared last year that we would be moving our information system away from Blackbaud and into a new platform called Veracross. Veracross has much more sophistication and delivers significantly higher levels of customer support.

We are currently in the middle of a two year transition between these two systems. Step 1 was to transition our admissions and enrollment system. Many of you have recently received the continuous enrollment update from our Admissions Director, Marion Greer, and our Admissions team. If you have not received that message, please check your emails and spam filters for a message from Mrs. Greer about this.

Special thanks to Mrs. Greer, Mrs. Fortier, and Mrs. O'Rear who have gotten through this enormous amount of transition work, in addition to their regular duties, over the last 9 months.

Step 2 is to configure, build, train, and roll out our Student Information System. The student information system is where all student academic-related information lives. This includes departments, courses, grades, transcripts, report cards, communication processes and templates, class scheduling, attendance, assignments, grading processes, and historical school records, including alumni information.

Building this process is ongoing even now, and requires an aggressive schedule to ensure everything is ready for faculty, families, and staff in time for Fall 2025. There are approximately 12 people involved in this data migration process at the moment, entailing a significant demand of time and energy. We appreciate your patience with us as we seek to get this right and ensure a smooth transition in our data systems.

## Schedule

Last year, we shared that we were beginning a review of our school's schedule. Our academic leadership team convened a work group—that has included Mark Garcia, Kory Hicks, Kelly Johnson, Matt Lambro, Shawn Mingledorff, Cheryl Macdonald, Meredith Morgan, and Lynne Tweedie—who began collecting information in August 2023 as part of our ongoing effort to steward our resources well in accordance with God's provision. We began with the idea of evaluating whether our schedule serves our community as well as it could.

As we read research about student learning and investigated what is done at other schools, we narrowed our areas of focus to solving for

- increased community gathering time,
- minimizing daily transitions to enhance student learning,
- protecting arts and athletics time.

As we sought to see the needs of our community through the eyes of the schedule, our team conducted student and parent focus groups during the Fall 2024 semester to gather further information.

Special thanks to Dr. Lambro, for helping facilitate focus groups and for leading us forward in considering potential changes. This team's work has been time-consuming, but it has yielded valuable feedback from faculty, parents, and students regarding our current schedule and the hope and aims of potential future schedules. Your feedback has enabled us to see much more than we would have seen.

By November, our work group narrowed its recommendations and since that time, the executive administrative team has continued to analyze the impact of changes to athletics, arts, pick-up/drop off, student development, class length, the overall academic program, professional development needs, infrastructure needs, facilities space, and more. As we did so, we have continued to see still more items surface that need deep consideration than could be resolved with excellence by August 2025. To give one small example: extending the amount of time we allocate to classes will require our teachers to recalibrate their lesson plans to this new schedule model. In order to allow them the needed time to adapt their existing work in optimal ways for student learning, we will need to allow them the opportunity to do so over the course of a school year, not in a compressed, six month schedule. We believe that you would agree that a prepared teacher is better able to provide a successful learning environment. Therefore, it seems accurate to say that our community is *ready*, but not yet *prepared*, to make a transition in schedule design.

Therefore, schedule change is on the horizon, but it is not here yet. We believe that the pacing of this change matters for our community. We want to execute this change with excellence as we strive to steward our people, facilities, and time usage wisely. Changing our schedule will have an impact on student schedules and transcripts, on faculty teaching load and sequencing, and on logistics, on food services, and on the athletic department's practice spaces and times.

While we remain committed to completely reworking our current schedule, we are guardedly optimistic about a couple of incremental, but meaningful, changes that are currently still being fine-tuned. These changes would potentially address some major pain points in our current schedule for next school year (Fall 2025), while we work and wait with the intention of rolling out additional changes for the following school year (Fall 2026).

The main changes we are considering for Fall 2025 are designed to improve student development and school culture across our sports teams, student clubs, discipleship opportunities, leadership opportunities, and grade levels. We do not foresee at this time that these changes would change the length of class time or number of classes during Fall 2025.

Thank you for your engagement, for your trust, and for your patience. We have been working hard to prepare our school for greater things and will continue to do so as we look forward to the bright future the Lord has in store for us all.