

**GROTON BOARD OF EDUCATION  
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES  
JANUARY 28, 2026 @ 6:00 P.M.  
CENTRAL OFFICE, ROOM 11/HYBRID**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Beverly Washington – Chairperson, Adrian Johnson - Vice Chairperson, Andrea Ackerman (remote), Sean Corocran (remote), Mitch Shinbrot (remote) Ian Thomas (remote), Jay Weitlauf (remote), Jennifer White (remote), Michael Whitney

**ALSO PRESENT:** Susan Austin, Anne Marie Mancini, Sam Kilpatrick, Lauren Casini (remote), Nolan Borysewicz

I. CALL TO ORDER – Mrs. Washington, Chairperson, called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m.

A. Pledge of Allegiance

The first order of business was the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag.

II. RECOGNITION AND PARTICIPATION OF VISITORS AND DELEGATIONS

- Superintendent Austin acknowledged Valerie Nelson as the DoDEA’s Inspire Award Winner for the Northeast Region. (Attachment #1)

III. COMMENTS FROM CITIZENS

- Mr. Carl Franklin offered to open conversations with the Board to obtain the land adjacent to the high school. Chairperson Washington stated that she will ask the Board if there is any interest in putting this topic on the referral list.

IV. RESPONSE TO COMMENTS FROM CITIZENS

NONE

V. STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE REPORT

Student Representative noted:

- Student Council is planning Prom
- Wrapping up first semester midterm exams
- Jacob Smith won ECC Athlete of the week
- Kiley Volan won Gymnastics
- Spring Musical of Into the Wood
- Concert in February
- First week of January students participated in the Eastern Regional Festival
- February 7 students will participate in the North Haven High School Festival
- Noted that the attendance rate was very high this month (90%)

## VI. SUPERINTENDENT AND ADMINISTRATION REPORTS

### A. Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent Reports

- Update re: Mentor Program – (Attachment #2)
  - Jennifer Anthony, Director of the Mentor Program, gave an overview of the PowerPoint presentation of the Mentor Program.

### B. Reports and Information from the Staff

1. Director of Buildings and Grounds – Mr. Kilpatrick gave a report on facilities:
  - The State requires testing of the HVAC systems. The first will be at CB and MM.
  - Charlie Varner, Custodial Supervisor, has been looking around all the schools to ensure that the AEDs are up to date. The expiration date of the adult AEDs is May 5, 2027, and for students is June of 2027.
  - The schools opened on time today. He noted the plowing and sanding of schools to accomplish that.

## VII. COMMITTEE REPORTS

1. Policy – Mr. Whitney noted that the Policy Committee met and went over several policies, Credit for Work Experience, Finance policies, Purchasing and Transferring of Funds and the rescinding of policy P 6163.1 Library Material Selection under New Business for Board approval.
2. Curriculum – There was no report. Next meeting will be February 1, 2026.
3. Finance/Facilities – There was no report. Next meeting will be February 3, 2026.
4. Communications – There was no report.
5. Athletic Fields – There was no report.
6. LEARN – Mrs. Washington noted that the LEARN Board met on January 15, 2026. They had a new Board orientation, discussed vacancies and hiring, the new Para placement Pathway State test, discussion of building project on Daniels Avenue in Waterford, discussed key legislative priorities of Magnet School funding, Teacher Registry, two statewide focus groups identifying on key legislative issues: 1. RESC Alliance includes groups from CABE, CAPSS, CASBO, SERP, CONCAN; 2. The House Chair Jennifer Liper brings together Superintendents, CAPSS Leadership, School and State Finance projects, SERC and RESC in an educational innovation cohort to help shape a Legislative agenda for the upcoming bi-annual session. The Disabilities Conference on March 14, 2026, at the Great Wolf Lodge Conference Center at Foxwoods, reviewed and approved proposed salaries.

## VIII. ACTION ITEMS

### A. Consent Agenda

MOTION: Whitney, Johnson: To approve the consent agenda with correction to the January 12, 2026, minutes, page 1 under Special Education district-wide Committee report that the general consensus in support of adding questions to the Climate Survey and instituting an exit survey. Chair requested questions be sent to the Chair in advance of the completion of the Climate Survey.

IX. ACTION ITEMS

A. Consent Agenda – cont.

PASSED – UNANIMOUSLY

B. Old Business

1. Discussion and possible action regarding approval of policy P 6161.13 Library Collection Development and Maintenance Policy as a second reading (Attachment #3)

MOTION: Whitney, Johnson: To approve policy P 6161.13 Library Collection Development and Maintenance Policy as a second reading.  
PASSED – UNANIMOUSLY

2. Discussion and possible action regarding approval of policy P 6161.14 Library Display and Program as a second reading (Attachment #4)

MOTION: Whitney, Johnson: To approve policy P 6161.14 Library Display and Program as a second reading  
PASSED – UNANIMOUSLY

C. New Business

1. Discussion and possible action regarding rescinding policy P 6163.1 Library Materials Selection (Attachment #5)

MOTION: Whitney, Johnson: To approve rescinding policy P 6163.1 Library Materials Selection.  
PASSED - UNANIMOUSLY

2. Discussion and possible action regarding recognition of School Counselor Appreciation Week.

MOTION: Washington Ackerman: To recognize February 2, 2026, through February 6, 2026, as School Counselor Appreciation Week, and to direct the Superintendent of Schools to send a letter of appreciation to the school counselors.  
PASSED - UNANIMOUSLY

IX. INFORMATION AND PROPOSALS

Letters, communications, and comments by Board members on meeting items and any other items in their jurisdiction.

- Mr. Johnson noted:
  - o Budget support to paraprofessionals
  - o Financial commitment for IB testing and the low number of IB diplomas awarded over the last four years
- Mr. Thomas noted the cracks in the front walkway at FHS.

- Mr. Thomas noted that he had several referrals that he will forward to the Chair.
- Mr. Corcoran noted that he had policy referrals that he will forward to the Chair
- Mr. Whitney noted comments for discussion regarding lapsing funds and DoDEA funds.
- Mrs. Washington noted:
  - o Concerns from a parent regarding the posting of the Honor Roll and concern from a parent regarding his son from Mr. Koschmieder.
  - o That she, Mr. Corcoran, and Superintendent Auston went to the CABB conference.

X. ADVANCE PLANNING

A. Future Meeting Dates and Calendar Items

As noted in the agenda.

B. Suggested Agenda Items

➤ NONE

XI. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Ackerman, Johnson: To adjourn at 7:37 p.m.  
PASSED UNANIMOUSLY



## Val Nelson Named as DoDEA's Inspire Award Winner for the Northeast Region

Since 2014, Groton Public Schools has received eight Department of Defense Education Activity Grants, and submitted the ninth one this year, however funding was postponed at this time. We have been collaborating with other military impacted districts from across the country and have attended and hosted regional conferences, as well as national conferences. The INSPIRE award is an annual recognition awarded to a single project director (PD) from each region who has demonstrated exceptional implementation of innovative practices in DoDEA grant-funded projects and has served as a motivation for others. Individuals are nominated by their peers as exemplars of servant inspiring their peers to strive for continuous improvement and adaptability. We are very proud to learn that our own Val Nelson has been named the Inspire Award Winner for the North East Region! Please see DoDEA's recognition below:

*Valerie Nelson, Groton Public Schools - Valerie Nelson exemplifies the INSPIRE Award criteria through her transformational leadership in educational excellence and innovation. As project director and implementation team member of several DoDEA grants, including Groton Public Schools' DoDEA-funded world language expansion initiative, Val demonstrates exceptional implementation of innovative practices. She has pioneered a comprehensive shift from traditional language instruction to a proficiency-based methodology aligned with ACTFL's World-Readiness Standards. Her visionary approach encompasses professional development, strategic hiring of world language teachers, and expansion to all five district elementary schools—directly impacting every student's global competency. Val's servant leadership shines through her dedicated focus on military-connected students, having previously led Charles Barnum Elementary School for 25 years where she created robust support systems for Navy families experiencing frequent transitions and deployments. Under her leadership, Barnum achieved remarkable success, including 100% student proficiency in mathematics testing and earning the prestigious National Blue Ribbon Award for exceptional achievement gap closure.*

*Val's inspirational impact extends beyond individual accomplishments to systemic change. By engaging all district world language teachers in multi-year professional development with ACTFL expert trainers, Val fosters continuous improvement and adaptability throughout the district. From the infancy of our regional communities of practice, Val has been a core member of our Northeast team. She is a reliable thought partner, collaborator, and friend, helping us all improve and find joy and humor in our work. Val's work embodies DoDEA's vision of providing excellence in education for every student, every day, everywhere. Her innovative world language program enhances students' global proficiency while deepening cultural understanding—particularly benefiting the military-connected population she has served with distinction throughout her career.*

# Groton Public Schools Mentor Program



*increasing student engagement and sense of belonging by connecting students, families and dedicated mentors*

# A Legacy of Belonging

## Our Mission

Our mission, directly aligned to Pillar 2 of the GPS Strategic Plan, is to foster a culture of belonging by connecting students with dedicated mentors in an effort to increase student engagement.

Through the work of dedicated adults from GPS and the local community, we strive to ensure that students have voice, agency and the belief that they are integral part of their school community.



## 2 Cultivate a Rich and Vibrant Learning Community

### Priorities:

- **Prioritize the physical and mental well-being of staff and students** through supportive programs and initiatives.
- **Ensure students have at least one trusted adult** who cares about them and knows their name, strengths, and story.
- **Foster meaningful family and community engagement** through accessible, frequent, and welcoming communication.
- **Encourage students to use SEL strategies** to build healthy identities, manage emotions, build empathy, maintain positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and achieve goals.
- **Empower student and educator agency** by providing opportunities for voice, leadership, and celebrations of learning.
- **Increase student and staff engagement** by emphasizing the importance of daily attendance.

**Foster a safe and inclusive environment that engages and empowers students, families, and staff.**

# Our Journey

## 1998 The Foundation

GPS Mentor Program Established

Program starts 22/23 school year with 2 matches

## 2022 Post-Covid Re-Energization

Program Director Hired

District Committee Formed

Initial Focus on GMS Transition

## 2026 Growth and Direction

Program grows - mentoring now at all Groton schools

Consistent student referrals

Alignment with GPS strategic plan



# Mentoring In Groton

- Adults building personal connections and encouraging student success through weekly meetings.
- Students building confidence and finding a voice through playing games, listening, talking and individual attention.
- A consistent avenue for student advocacy and student representation - allowing students a space to be successful.
- Mentors and mentees sharing stories and exposing each other to different experiences and values.
- An opportunity to create meaningful connections between our students and members of the GPS and local community.



# Mentor Recruitment

- News Media Highlights
- Public Access
- Social Media
- Information Sessions
- Community outreach and partnerships

## Groton kids have more mentors in their corner



Mentor Maggie Lyons, a first grade teacher, and fifth grader Annalise Julius react while watching tablets start to bubble while they make lava lamps Friday, Jan. 19, 2024, at Catherine Kolnaski Magnet School. Mentors spending time with students is part of the Groton Public Schools Mentor Program. (Dana Jensen/The Day)

# Mentor Screening Process

- Human resources application and background check
- Interview
- Reference Checks
- Interest Survey
- Initial Training



# Our Mentors

- **Business Partners**

EB, Chelsea Groton Bank, Tree Trails, Town of Groton

- **Community members**

geologists, publishers, architects, painters, dog sitters, environmental scientists, politicians, fire fighters, engineers

- **GPS employees**

teachers, tutors, custodians, speech therapists, administrators



# Student Referrals

Students are referred to the program for a myriad of reasons.

- improve attendance
- increase confidence
- build personal connections with peers
- learn from positive role models

Students are referred by staff members as well as parents/caregivers.



# Mentor Retention

- Community Partners Program
- Annual Mentor Dinner
- Program Evaluation & Voice
- Ongoing Training
- Frequent program updates

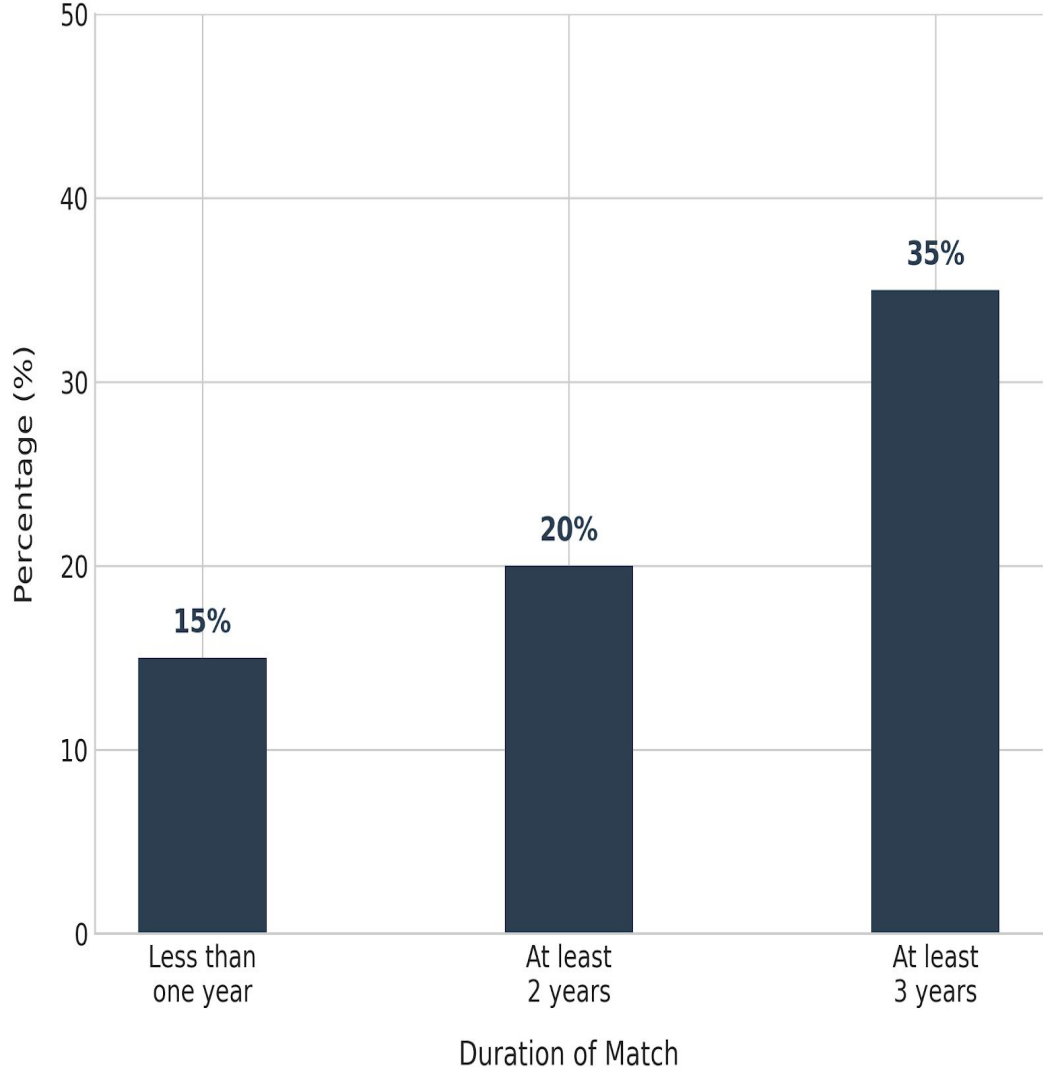


# Program Enrollment Data

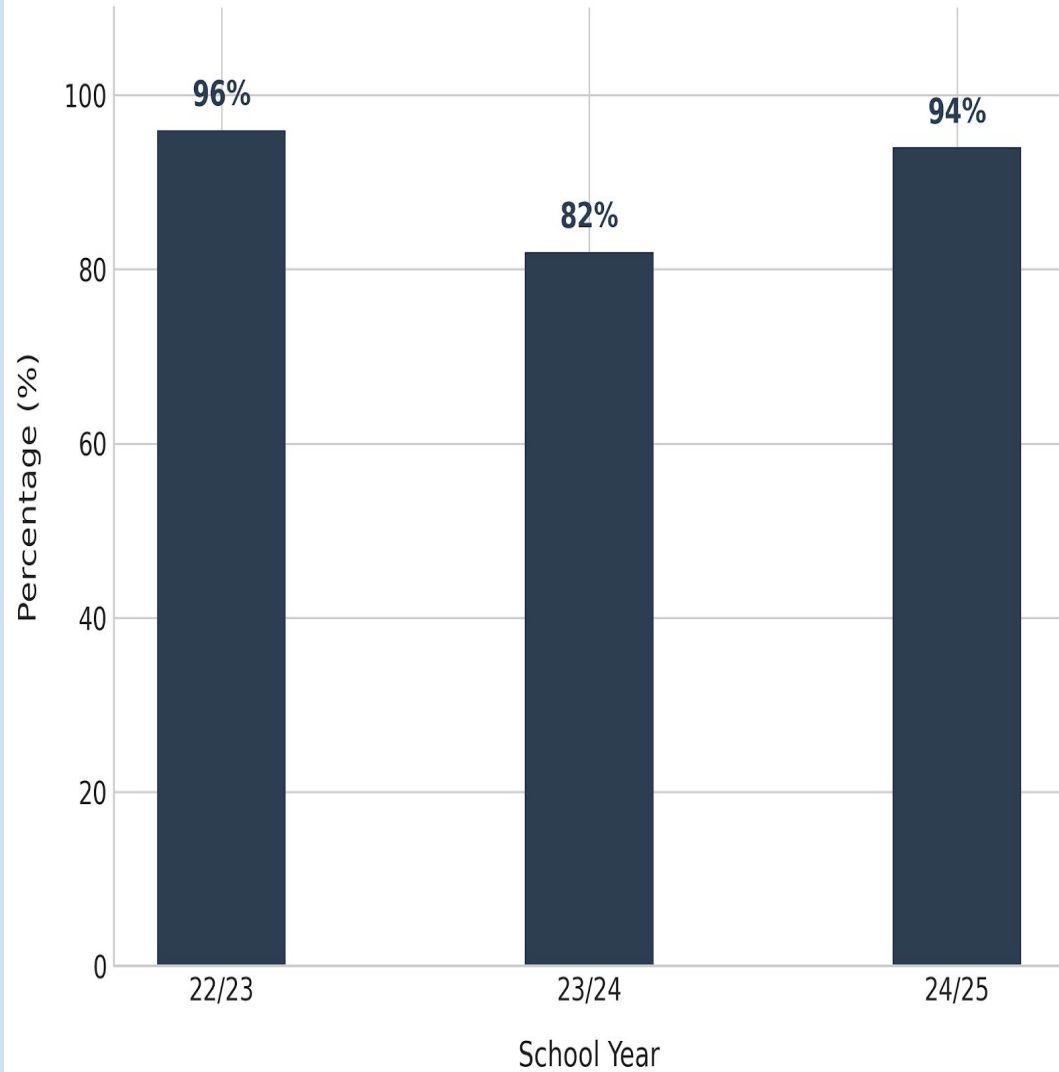
- From 2 to over 70 active matches in 3 years
- 33 GPS staff members volunteer to be mentors
- Over 500 + volunteer hours logged this year



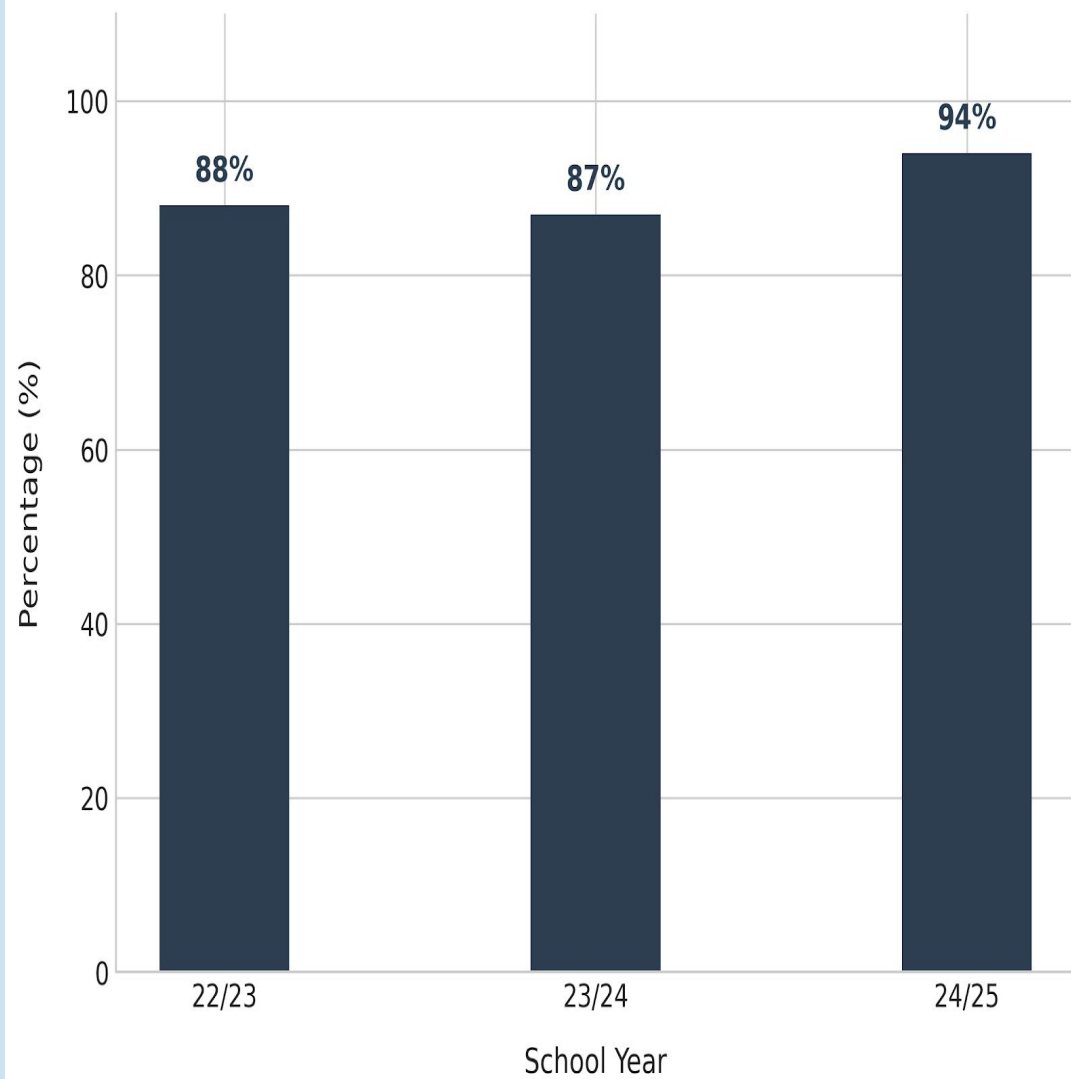
# Mentor-Mentee Matches In Years Together



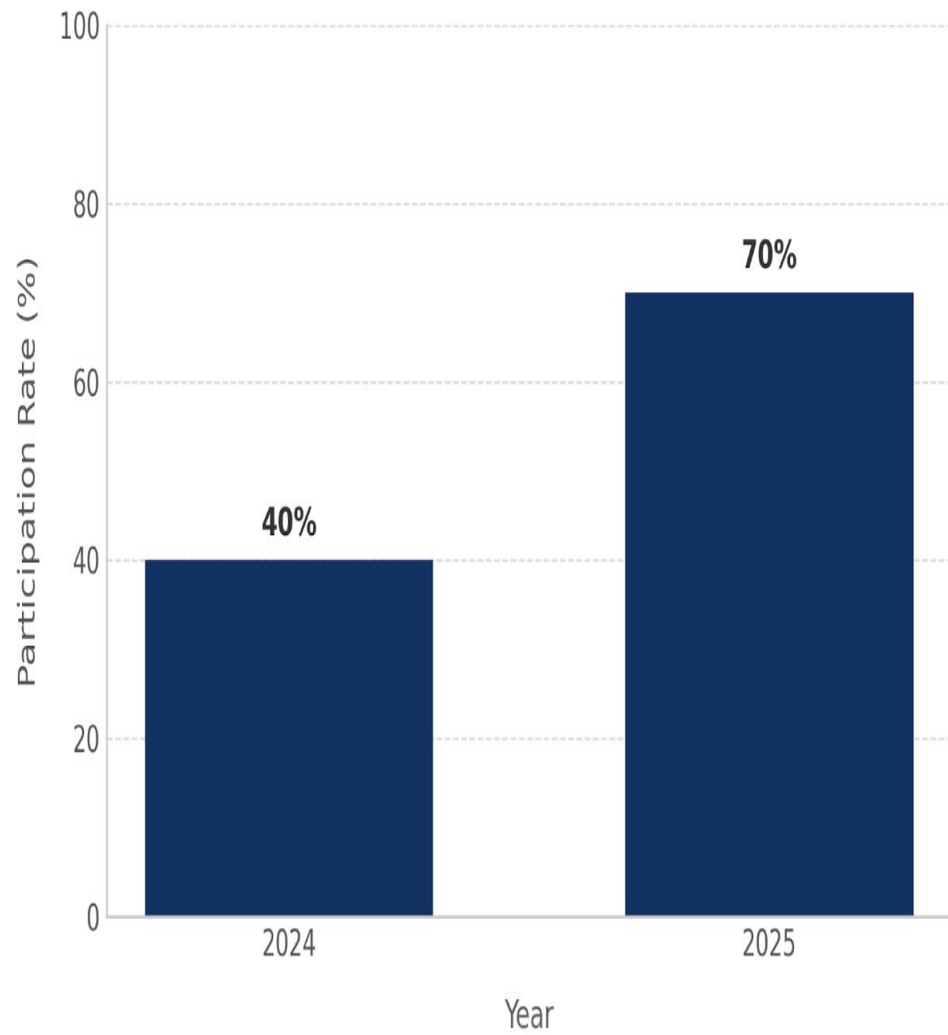
## Student Desire To Continue In The Program



## Students Who Look Forward To Attending School on Mentorship Day



## Family Engagement



# Attendance Impact

- 63% increased attendance rate
- 11% increased attendance rate by +5%
- 3 students have exited chronically absent status

\*data based on students who have been in the program for more than 1 year



# Parent Testimonials

“It is everything for her to have this mentor program. If it wasn't for the consistency and stability of her mentor I would feel lost. When my daughter needs extra support and I am not able to provide it, she gets it through the mentor program.”

“The mentorship program is significant. It fosters my child's confidence, provides a strong support system, and equips him with the mindset to achieve goals. The program has been a great help in my child's educational development. He loves his mentor, and he looks forward to seeing him every Wednesday. He is his role model.”

“My daughter loves the program. I have noticed such a huge difference with her confidence at school. Last year was tough but she's really come out of her shell this year!”



# Mentor Testimonials

“This is a great program that Groton Schools offers. It is not only helpful to the students who might need some attention and time directed just to them, but also it is constructive for Groton citizens to see the wonderful things going on in schools.”

Community Mentor

“Creating time in my schedule weekly to carve out nothing but 'relationship building' time (and not lecturing or talking about choices/school) was outstanding. I'm really glad it has returned and I'm glad I decided to do it.”

GPS Employee

“As an educator, the past three years have been a true gift.” This opportunity has become a steady part of my self-care routine. Sharing time with my mentor brings me joy. I have watched my mentee go from a reluctant fifth grader to a more open, fun loving eighth grader. This program is one of the best parts of my work week.” - GPS Teacher

# Mentee Testimonials

“I can talk to her about anything.”

“I learned that it’s not much fun for the other player if you cheat at uno.”

“She makes me want to come to school.”

“My mentor makes sure I’m okay.”

He teaches me about different classes I can take when I am older.”

“She teaches me how to control my temper and keep my grades up.”

“to be kind, patient and never judge a book by it’s cover.

“I wish he could come more often.”

“She tells me to keep trying if something isn’t working.”

“She taught me how to sew.”

## STRENGTHS

- Mutually beneficial relationships = retention
- Increase in student engagement and attendance
- PD & Supply Funding
- Lessening the burden on SEL services
- Increase in staff morale & parental approval
- Community visibility

## WEAKNESSES

- Inability to build partnerships during business hours
- Delayed communication and problem solving
- Referral process inconsistent across the district

## OPPORTUNITIES

- Expanding into peer-peer mentorship
- Increasing opportunities for family engagement
- Increasing partnerships with businesses and organizations
- Enhance the Career Pathway program with further mentor outreach

## THREATS

- Mentor retention decreases due to an inability to act on evaluation suggestions
- Stipend positions don't match scope of work - (program of this size requires more first-shift hours)
- Increased responsibilities for community coordinators
- Staff burnout - GMS, FHS, Program Staff
- Waiting list grows - limited path forward for recruiting mentors

## A Small Commitment, A Big Impact: My Journey as a Mentor

Four years ago, I joined the Groton Public Schools Mentor Program, not fully knowing what to expect—only that I wanted to make a difference. I was matched with a bright, curious seventh grader, and since then, we've met weekly for about 40 minutes. Today, she's a sophomore in high school, and our bond has grown into something truly special.

Our time together is simple. We play games like Yahtzee, Battleship, and Connect Four. Sometimes we dive into art projects. But more often than not, we just talk. She shares her celebrations, her struggles, and her thoughts. I listen. I offer options without judgment and guidance without grades. I'm not her teacher or her parent—I'm just someone she can trust, someone she can ask questions freely and safely.

Recently, I asked her if she still enjoys having me around. Without hesitation, she said, *"You are my person. I trust you with everything and can't wait for you to see me graduate."* That moment reminded me why I started mentoring in the first place. It's such a small amount of my time, but it's made a big difference in her life—and in mine.

Mentoring isn't about fixing or teaching—it's about showing up, being present, and creating a space where a young person feels seen and heard. Watching her navigate adolescence with resilience and openness has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life.

If you've ever considered mentoring, I encourage you to take that step. You never know the impact you might have—or the joy you might find.

**P 6161.13****Community Relations/Instruction****Library Collection Development and Maintenance Policy**

The Groton Board of Education (Board) recognizes that library and other education materials should be provided for the interest, information and enlightenment of all students, and represent a wide range of varied and diverging viewpoints in the collection as a whole.

Students shall have access to the library and other educational material that is relevant to the research, independent reading interests, and educational needs of students based on a student's age, development, or grade level.

The library media center is an important place for voluntary inquiry, the dissemination of information and ideas, and the promotion of free expression and free access to ideas by students.

A library media specialist is professionally trained to curate and develop a collection that shall provide students with access to the widest array of age-appropriate and grade-level-appropriate library and other educational material.

The Superintendent shall create an administrative regulation that establishes a procedure for a certified library media specialist to continually review library and other educational material within a school library media center using professionally accepted standards which shall include, but need not be limited to: the material's relevance, physical condition of the material, availability of duplicates or copies of the material, availability of more recent age-appropriate or grade-level appropriate material and continued demand for the material.

Policy Adopted:

GROTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
Groton, Connecticut

## **Community Relations/Instruction**

### **Library Collection Development and Maintenance**

#### **Purpose:**

This regulation establishes a procedure for certified school library media specialists to continually review library and other educational materials within a school library media center to ensure that they are relevant, in good condition, and age- or grade-level-appropriate.

#### **General Procedure:**

Using the criteria identified below and their professional judgment, the school library media specialist shall conduct a systematic review of the library's collection:

##### **1. Material relevance**

- a. Consult with instructional staff to determine whether the material is still useful and has up-to-date information.
- b. Evaluate usage data to assess the material's relevance to student interests and research needs.

##### **2. Physical condition of the material**

- a. Assess whether the material is damaged or worn beyond reasonable use.

##### **3. Availability of duplicates or copies of the material**

- a. Determine whether the availability of duplicates or multiple copies is justified based on usage statistics to avoid redundancy.

##### **4. Availability of more recent age-appropriate or grade-level appropriate material**

- a. Investigate the availability of newer editions or versions that offer more current and accurate information by considering awards and recommended lists for recently recognized literature.
- b. Ensure that any new material uses language that is appropriate for the reading level of students in the targeted grade range and developmental levels.
- c. Evaluate whether the new material's treatment of difficult or sensitive subjects (e.g., death, mental health, violence, sexuality) is in a developmentally appropriate way for the intended student audience.

##### **5. Continued demand for the material**

- a. Consult with instructional staff to determine whether the material continues to be cited or referred to for classroom instruction.
- b. Review usage data to determine whether the material is still being sought by students or teachers.

Adopted:

GROTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
Groton, Connecticut



# GROTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## ADMINISTRATION OFFICES

P.O. Box K, Groton, Connecticut 06340 • 1300 Flanders Road, Mystic, Connecticut 06355  
PHONE (860) 572-2100 • FAX (860) 572-2107

**R 6161.13**  
**Form**

### Library and Other Educational Material Assessment Form

**Title of the material:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date of Assessment:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Author:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Assessor:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date of Publication:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Material relevance:**

- Consulted with knowledgeable staff member(s) or teacher(s)
- The language is appropriate for the reading level of students in the targeted grade range
- Material is up-to-date and accurate

*Notes:*

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**Physical condition of the material:**

**Condition rating:**

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

**Availability of duplicates or copies of the material:**

Count of available copies: \_\_\_\_\_

*Notes:*

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**Availability of more recent age-appropriate or grade-level appropriate material:**

If new material is available:

- It uses language appropriate for the reading level of students in the targeted grade range
- Presents difficult subjects (death, mental health, violence, sexuality etc.) in a developmentally appropriate way

*Notes:*

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**Continued demand for the material:**

Describe the frequency with which the material is being accessed:

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**Determination:**

Retain       Replace       Remove

Explanation of decision and rationale

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**P 6161.14**

## **Community Relations/Instruction**

### **Library Display and Program**

Library displays and student programs are critical in serving as resources for voluntary inquiry, the dissemination of information and ideas, and promoting free expression and free access to ideas by students.

The Groton Board of Education (Board) recognizes that library displays are provided for the interest, information and enlightenment of all students, represent a wide range of varied and diverging viewpoints, and provide access to content that is relevant to the research, independent interests and educational needs of students.

The Board acknowledges that a school library media specialist is professionally trained to curate and develop displays and programs that shall provide students with access to the widest array of age-appropriate and grade-level-appropriate library and other educational materials.

#### **Legal References:**

PA 25-168 An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2027, and Making Appropriations Therefore, and Provisions Related to Revenue and Other Items Implementing the State Budget

**P-6163.1****Instruction****Library Materials Selection**

The Groton Board of Education provides a broad range of educational materials to enrich and support the curriculum and to meet the needs of individual students and teachers.

**Objectives of Selection**

The primary objective of the school library is to implement, enrich, and support the educational program across the District and to make available a selected collection of books and related materials that satisfy the informational, recreational, and cultural reading needs of the children of the town.

**Selection Personnel**

The professional staff should provide students with a wide range of materials reflecting a broad diversity of cultural and world views. Materials should be available in a variety of formats and represent varying levels of difficulty and varying points of view. In selecting library resources, library media specialists, staff, administrators, and faculty are guided by the principles incorporated in the School Library Bill of Rights, the Freedom to Read Statement, standards adopted by the American Association of School Librarians and the Connecticut State Department of Education.

Legal References: ~~Connecticut Statutes Sec. 10-221~~

Adopted: ~~March 8, 1999~~ ~~GROTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS~~  
Revised: ~~June 26, 2023~~ ~~Groton, Connecticut~~