

GRAND ISLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
**ANNUAL REPORT**  
2024-2025





## CURRENT ADMINISTRATION

Matt Fisher, Superintendent, [mfisher@gips.org](mailto:mfisher@gips.org)

Dr. Summer Stephens, Associate Superintendent, [sstephens@gips.org](mailto:sstephens@gips.org)

Dr. Toni Palmer, Chief of Elementary Education, [tpalmer@gips.org](mailto:tpalmer@gips.org)

Virgil Harden, Chief Financial Officer, [vharden@gips.org](mailto:vharden@gips.org)

Dr. Carrie Kolar, Chief of Human Capital Management, [ckolar@gips.org](mailto:ckolar@gips.org)

Mitchell Roush, Director of Communications, [mroush@gips.org](mailto:mroush@gips.org)

Cory Gearhart, Chief Information Officer, [cgearhart@gips.org](mailto:cgearhart@gips.org)

\*Data reflects the 24-25 School Year.

Administrative staff updated to 25-26 School Year.



@GIPublicSchools | [WWW.GIPS.ORG](http://WWW.GIPS.ORG)

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# GIPS STATE REPORT CARD SHOWS STUDENT GROWTH, BETTER ATTENDANCE, & GRAD RATE ADJUSTMENTS

Educating students through the work of public education is the most meaningful commitment a community can make. In that work, our educators, support staff, students, families, and community partner together to shape the learning experiences of our **10,000** students. Part of that work always includes reflection on the growth we see in our schools.

Each year, the Nebraska Department of Education releases their annual reporting of public schools assessment performance. Their reporting systems provide an opportunity to look at the previous school year's data to see performance and improvement areas in our schools. While these yearly reports do not cover all we do in our schools, they are a helpful tool for us at GIPS as we continue our work of educating students.

The biggest takeaway from our state report card is this: **Students learn better and grow more when they are at school.**

What is our focus going forward?

Our newly launched strategic plan, **"80. 90. 100: Empowering Student Success"**, charts exactly our focus for the next four years:

- Focusing on student growth.
- Maintaining better school attendance.
- Empowering students to have a confident plan for after high school.

At Grand Island Public Schools, we strive to provide an exceptional educational experience for our students across the district. We believe every student can succeed. Our invitation remains the same, in that we invite our families and community to join us as we seek to empower every student.



**Matt Fisher**  
GIPS Superintendent



# MISSION & VISION

**Vision:** Students prepared to make positive contributions to society and thrive in an ever-changing world.

**Mission:** Every Student, Every Day, A Success! In educating students, we teach hearts as well as minds.

**Student Commitments:** Within the school district of Grand Island

- Every student will be taught to read, write, and communicate effectively; solve problems; acquire and apply knowledge; and demonstrate mastery through performance to the best of the student's abilities;
- Every student will be treated with fairness and dignity;
- Every student will be honored for their unique qualities and backgrounds;
- Every student will experience a sense of belonging, contribution, and success;
- Every student will develop responsibility and show respect for others as well as oneself;
- Every student will have equitable access to high-quality learning;
- Every student will learn in an inclusive and anti-discriminatory environment.



# GIPS SCHOOLS & LEADERSHIP



**Early Childhood Education**  
*O'Connor Learning Center*  
 Brad Wolfe, Interim Coordinator



**Starr Elementary**  
 Selena Valentine, Principal



**Dodge Elementary**  
 Angie Eberle, Principal



**Stolley Park Elementary**  
 Whitney Flower, Principal



**Engleman Elementary**  
 Charity LaBrie, Principal



**Wasmer Elementary**  
 Hannah Luber, Principal



**Gates Elementary**  
 Bianca Ayala, Principal



**West Lawn Elementary**  
 Dr. Maggie Mintken, Principal



**Howard Elementary**  
 Jessica Schroeder, Principal



**Barr Middle School**  
 Sheree Stockwell, Principal



**Jefferson Elementary**  
 Kate Crowe, Principal



**Walnut Middle School**  
 Rod Foley, Principal



**Knickrehm Elementary**  
 Jennie Ritter, Principal



**Westridge Middle School**  
 Kayla Wichman, Principal



**Lincoln Elementary**  
 Breanna McDonald, Principal



**Grand Island Senior High**  
 Calvin Hubbard, Principal



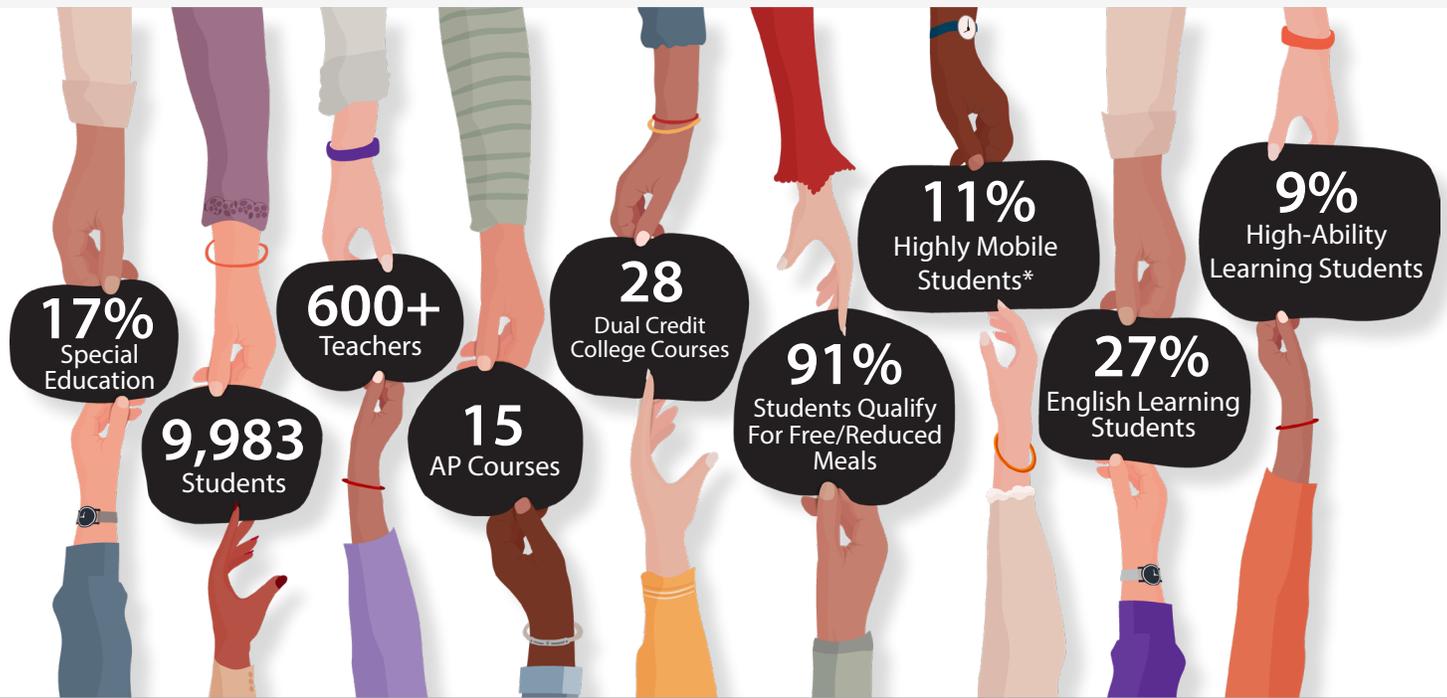
**Newell Elementary**  
 Nate Balcom, Principal



**Shoemaker Elementary**  
 Lee Wolfe, Principal



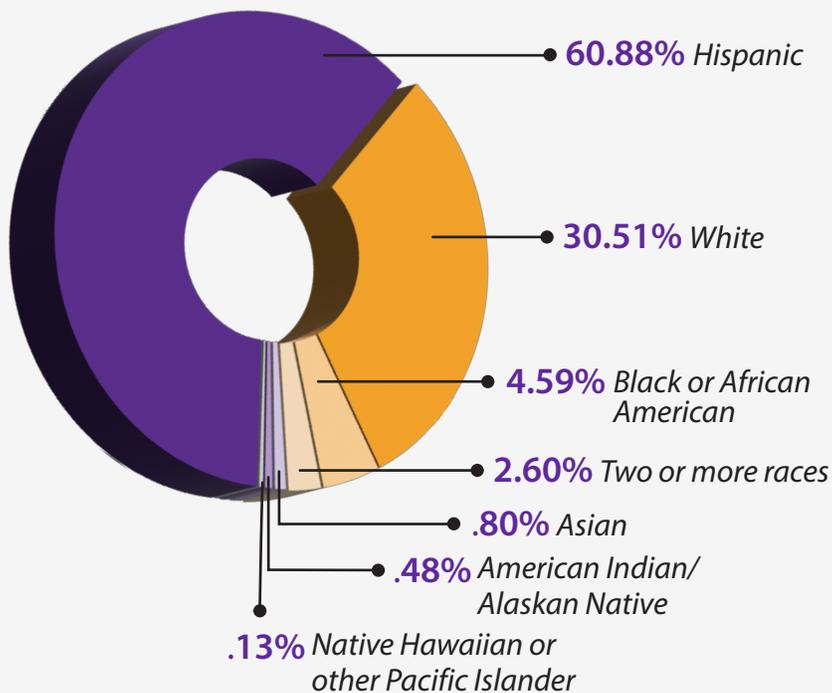
# GIPS FAST FACTS & DEMOGRAPHICS



\*Student attending two or more schools in a twelve month period.



## RACE & ETHNICITY



42  
Spoken  
Languages

# NORTH AMERICA



CAYMAN ISLANDS  
CUBA  
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC  
EL SALVADOR  
GUATEMALA  
HONDURAS  
MEXICO  
NICARAGUA  
PANAMA  
PUERTO RICO  
UNITED STATES

# SOUTH AMERICA



ARGENTINA  
BOLIVIA  
BRAZIL  
CHILE  
COLOMBIA  
ECUADOR  
PERU  
URUGUAY  
VENEZUELA

GIPS STUDENTS' COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

# EUROPE & ASIA



BELGIUM  
BULGARIA  
BURMA  
CHINA  
CYPRUS  
FRANCE  
GERMANY  
NORWAY  
INDIA  
IRAQ  
ITALY  
JAPAN  
JORDAN  
LAOS  
MACEDONIA  
MICRONESIA  
MONGOLIA  
PHILIPPINES  
SAUDI ARABIA  
SPAIN  
THAILAND  
VIETNAM

# AFRICA



BOTSWANA  
CAMEROON  
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC  
CHAD  
DJIBOUTI  
EGYPT  
ETHIOPIA  
GUINEA  
KENYA  
NIGERIA  
SOUTH AFRICA  
SUDAN  
SOMALIA  
TOGO  
UGANDA  
ZIMBABWE

\*Data current as of November 2025

*Every Student, Every Day, A Success!*

# 2025-2029 GIPS STRATEGIC PLAN

We believe every student can [and deserves to] succeed.

Grand Island Public Schools strives to provide an exceptional educational experience for students across our district.

We hold ourselves to the highest standards and work with staff, families, and our community to provide students the support they need to excel in the classroom and in life.

For the next five years, GIPS will embark on an aligned Strategic Plan designed to empower student success.



# 80 • 90 • 100

## EMPOWERING STUDENT SUCCESS



## GOAL: 80%

**K-8th:** 80% of Students Exhibiting Average or Above Average Growth.

**9th-12th:** 80% of Students Passing & Meeting Standards in ALL Classes.

### **FOCUS FOR 2025-26:**

- Utilizing PLC process to engage in standards based planning and data driven decision making to improve student results.
- Increase students' use of academic language to better articulate their understanding and take greater ownership of their learning.



## GOAL: 90%

90% of Students have 95% attendance rate or higher.

### **FOCUS FOR 2025-26:**

- Establish a GIPS Attendance Task Force of Teachers, Counselors, SWs, Principals, Admin., Parents, Students, & Community Reps.
- Develop an MTSS-Attendance Framework.
- Build a repository of "best practices" already in place throughout the district.



## GOAL: 100%

100% of Graduates Have a Plan for After High School.

### **FOCUS FOR 2025-26:**

- Gather input from all stakeholders to define the desired attributes of a GIPS graduate.
- Develop an aligned PK-12 Learner Profile.
- Build a plan for integration and alignment.



# STUDENT GROWTH & IMPROVEMENT REPORT

In addition to the state’s assessments to gather a year-to-year snapshot of student learning, the district monitors student progress more frequently. GIPS uses three rigorous assessments throughout the year to show how students have improved during the school year. While the state calculations currently focus more on if a student is proficient, the district’s data focuses more on whether the student is showing positive growth.

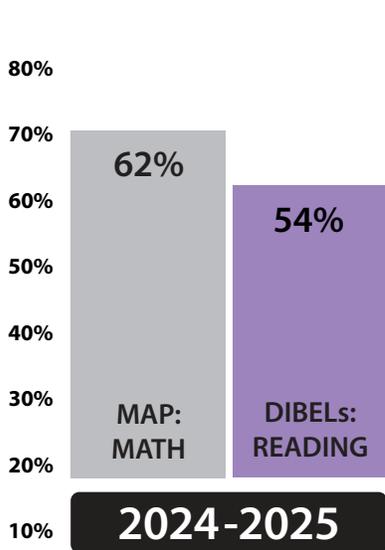
GIPS is proud of the teaching and learning happening in our classrooms every day as we continue to see positive growth.

**Assessments:**

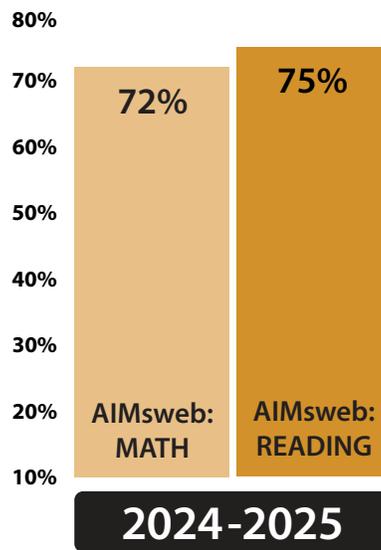
- **MAP:** Measures of academic progress. *Math assessment.*
- **DIBELS:** Dynamic indicators of basic early literacy skills. *Reading (ELA) assessment.*
- **AIMsweb:** AimswebPLUS is an assessment tool GIPS middle schools use to test students in Reading and Math, track their progress.

## Goal 80% or Higher

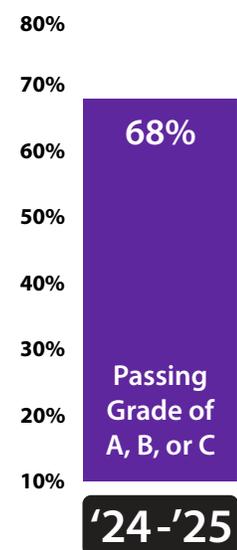
**KG-5th Grade Growth**  
In Math & Reading



**6th-8th Grade Growth**  
In Math & Reading



**9th-12th Grade Growth**  
Students are passing with a grade of A, B or C in all classes

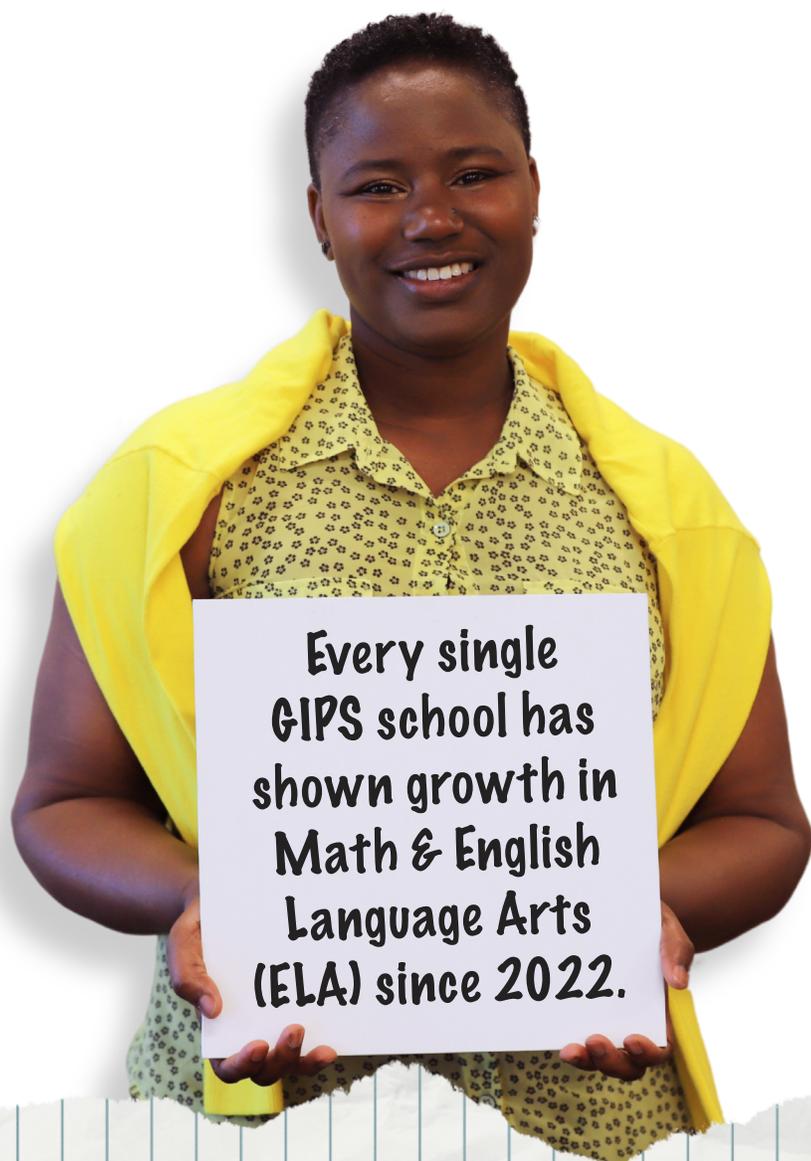




## DID YOU KNOW?

11 of our schools showed growth in Math & ELA this year.

This year's EL student English proficiency growth matches the **highest single year of growth in four years.**



Every single GIPS school has shown growth in Math & English Language Arts (ELA) since 2022.

# STUDENT LEARNING SNAPSHOT

## State Reporting Data

The Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) releases an annual report of public schools assessment performance. Each year their reporting systems provide an opportunity to look at the previous school year's data to see performance and improvement areas in our schools.

While these yearly reports do not cover all we do in our schools, they are a helpful tool for us at GIPS as we continue our work of educating students.

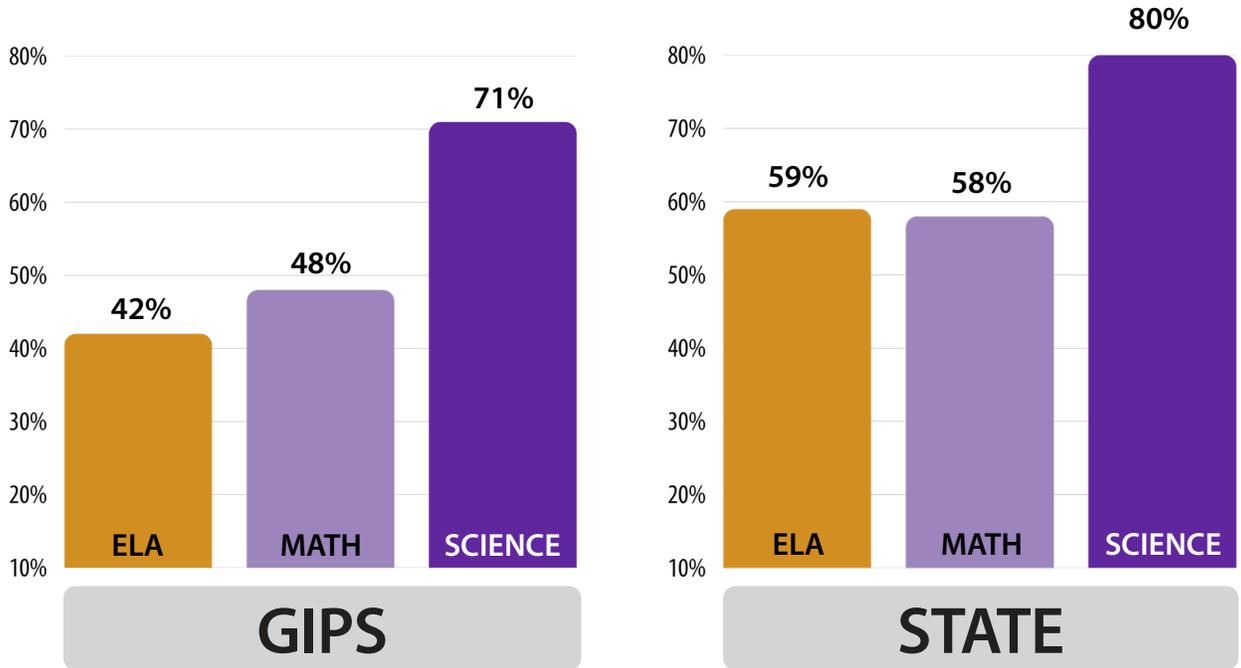
### What are NSCAS & AQuESTT?

NSCAS stands for the Nebraska Student-Centered Assessment System. AQuESTT stands for Accountability for a Quality Education System, Today and Tomorrow. Both are accountability standards developed by the Nebraska Department of Education and the Federal Government.

NSCAS and AQuESTT provide a measure of how our students are performing and demonstrating growth on Nebraska State Standards in English Language Arts, Math, and Science.

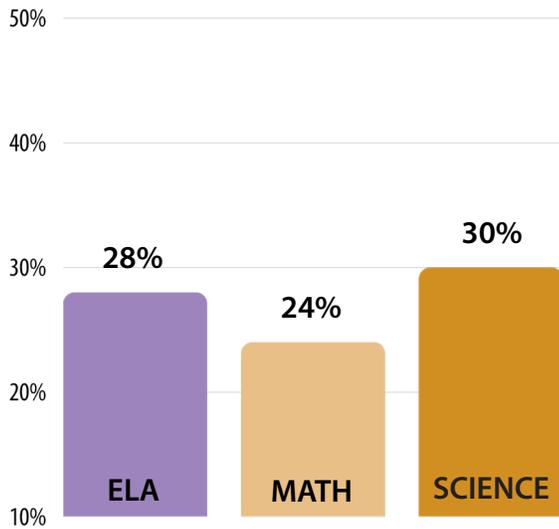


## NSCAS Percentage of Students Proficient '24-'25

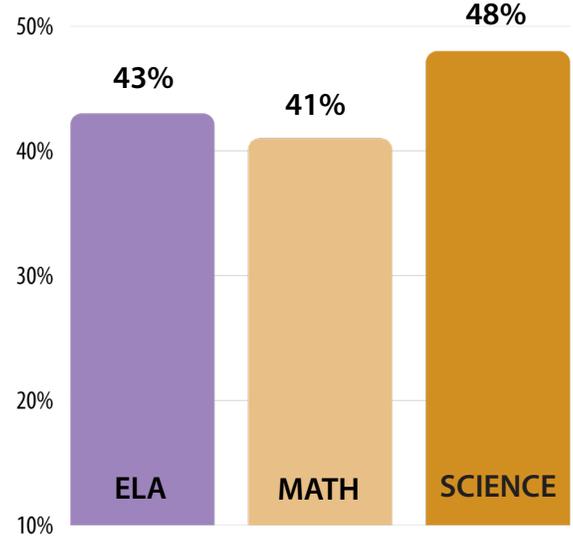


# ACT Percentage of Students Proficient '24-'25

All Juniors take the ACT (American College Testing).



**GIPS**



**STATE**

## 2024-2025 AQUESST REPORT

Along with continued student growth, our overall ratings for schools are trending in the upward direction as well. We have more "Great" schools than last year, and a number of our "Good" schools are close to breaking through into the "Great" category. Our 2024-25 report card (based on last year's assessments) shows:

-  "Great" GIPS Schools
-  "Good" GIPS Schools
-  "Needs Support to Improve" GIPS Schools

Our continued improvement, no matter how incremental, affirms for us that our teachers, support staff, academic coaches, curriculum coordinators, and Principals are doing a wonderful job of educating our students.



# GIPS GRADUATION RATE EXPLAINED

## Why has our Graduation Rate Fluctuated?

In 2024, GIPS reported a graduation rate of **85%**. In 2025, the graduation rate reports **76%**. Behind that number is an important story. We expected this year's graduation rate dip. Why?

The **76%** reflects a "bubble year", and it is all to an intentional adjustment we made a few years ago. As our English Language Learner & Newcomers programs have grown rapidly the last few years, we analyzed how students were enrolled in these programs.

Previously, we automatically enrolled incoming English Language Learner (EL) students as freshmen, regardless of their age or prior schooling. However, a few years ago, we made a strategic shift to an age-appropriate enrollment model, meaning that our EL students are now intentionally placed in the grade level corresponding to their age. This ensures better alignment with their educational needs while helping them adjust during such a big transition.

So, how do we get to **76%**?

The dip in our graduation rate this year is largely attributable to the last class of students enrolled under our previous EL model. This resulted in a disproportionately high number who did not complete their requirements within four years, or who left school because a four-year high school plan was not their original education goal.

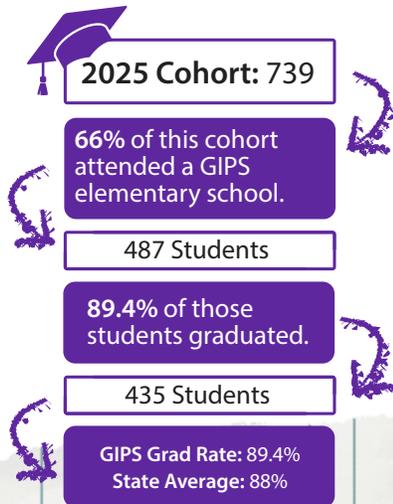
Our current system does a better job of honoring our students' identities and educational needs. We anticipate the graduation rate going forward will be consistent with our previous year's range of mid-to-high eighties.



## What Is Our Reality?

Students who enrolled at Grand Island Public Schools from elementary through high school have a graduation rate that outperforms the state average of **88%**. The earlier that students attend GIPS schools and stay, the higher chance they have of graduating. Considerations that can impact the graduation rate include students enrolling at later stages of education or for a brief period of time (*i.e. high mobility rate*). It is important to recognize that every student has a unique high school experience that may span from four to seven years based on if they need additional assistance, such as special education services.

### Looking Back at Our 2025 Graduation Cohort:

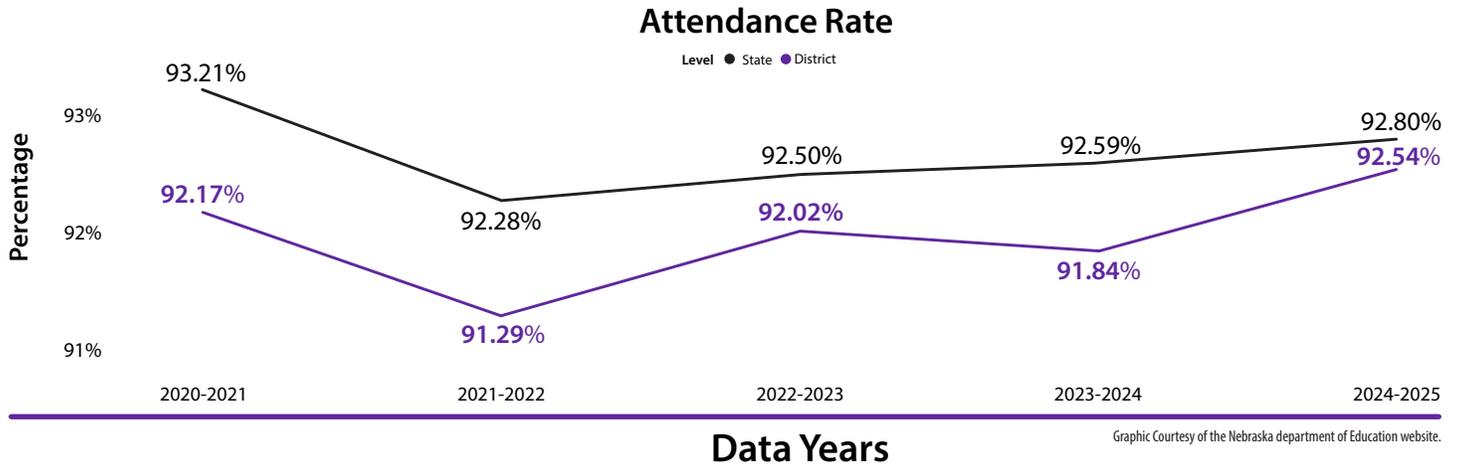


# ATTENDANCE RATE

## What Counts as Chronic Absent Students?

The target percentage is calculated based on the goal of reducing chronic absenteeism rates by half over 10 years, or a 5% improvement on the baseline rate each year.

Students are chronically absent when they miss 10% or more of school days. This equates to being absent about 2 days per month.



## Strategic Plan Goal: 90% of Students have a 95% Attendance Rate or Higher

Students learn best when they are at school.

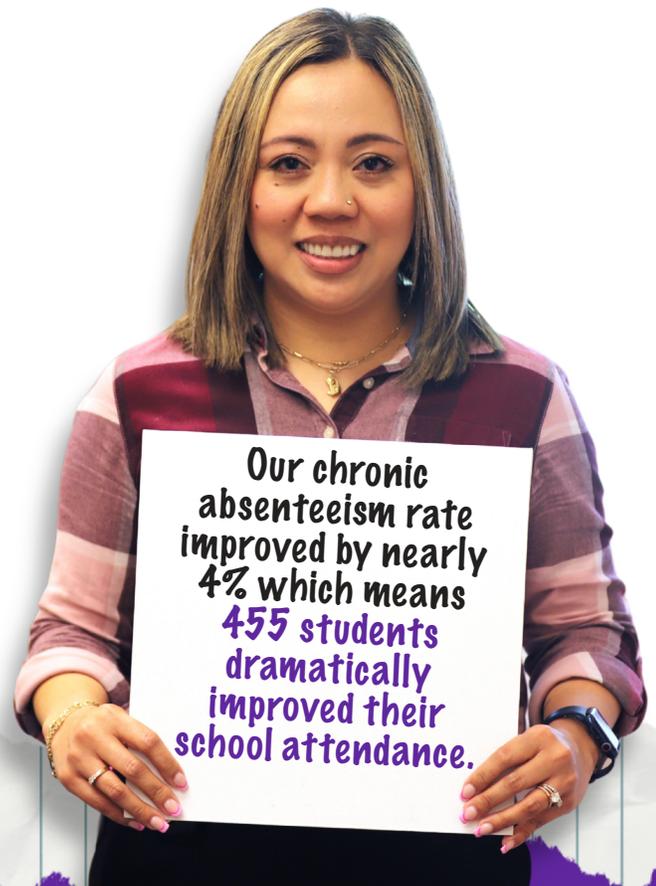
While that truth may seem obvious, we understand the importance in partnering with our families and community to champion better attendance rates across our district.

We are getting better every day, but we have room to grow. All academic achievement, extracurricular pursuits, and career-and-college readiness starts by being in school.

We need our students in school so we may continue empowering them for success.

### Focus For 2025-2026:

- Establish a GIPS Attendance Task Force of teachers, counselors, social workers, principals, administrators, parents, students, & community members.
- Develop a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) attendance framework.
- Build a repository of “best practices” already in place throughout the district.
- Educate on the importance of attendance.



# BEYOND GRAND ISLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS



“The GIPS Cast” is our conversation-based podcast exploring the voices of GIPS. We are driven by our mission of *Every Student, Every Day, A Success*.

“The GIPS Cast”: a window into the world of public education through the lens of one of Nebraska’s largest, most diverse school districts.

“The GIPS Cast” mini-series, “Beyond GIPS”, features voices of GIPS alumni sharing their journeys in careers and communities.

Because part of what makes the work of public education so meaningful is seeing how passionate individuals continue to make an impact, even after high school graduation.

## CULTIVATING A SENSE OF HOME IN GRAND ISLAND

The GIPS Cast, Ep. 067

“We’re making history together right now.”

**Laura Gamboa Urrego** is a true community advocate.

As the Director of Community Engagement at Stuhr Museum, and a proud Grand Island Senior High alum (**Class of 2016**) — Laura believes everyone should feel welcome in their hometown.



LISTEN NOW

## PUBLIC SCHOOLS, THE TRADES & COMMUNITY IMPACT

The GIPS Cast, Ep. 070

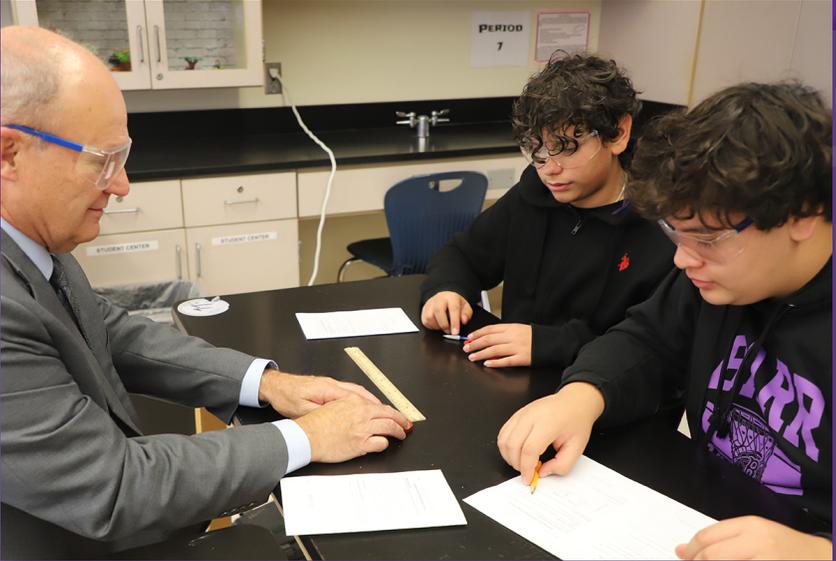
As a proud Islander alum of the **class of 1995**, **Brian Levander** knew he wanted a future in the trades.

And that’s where his passion led him. Nearly 30 years later, Brian is the proud Owner & CEO of Levander’s Automotive.

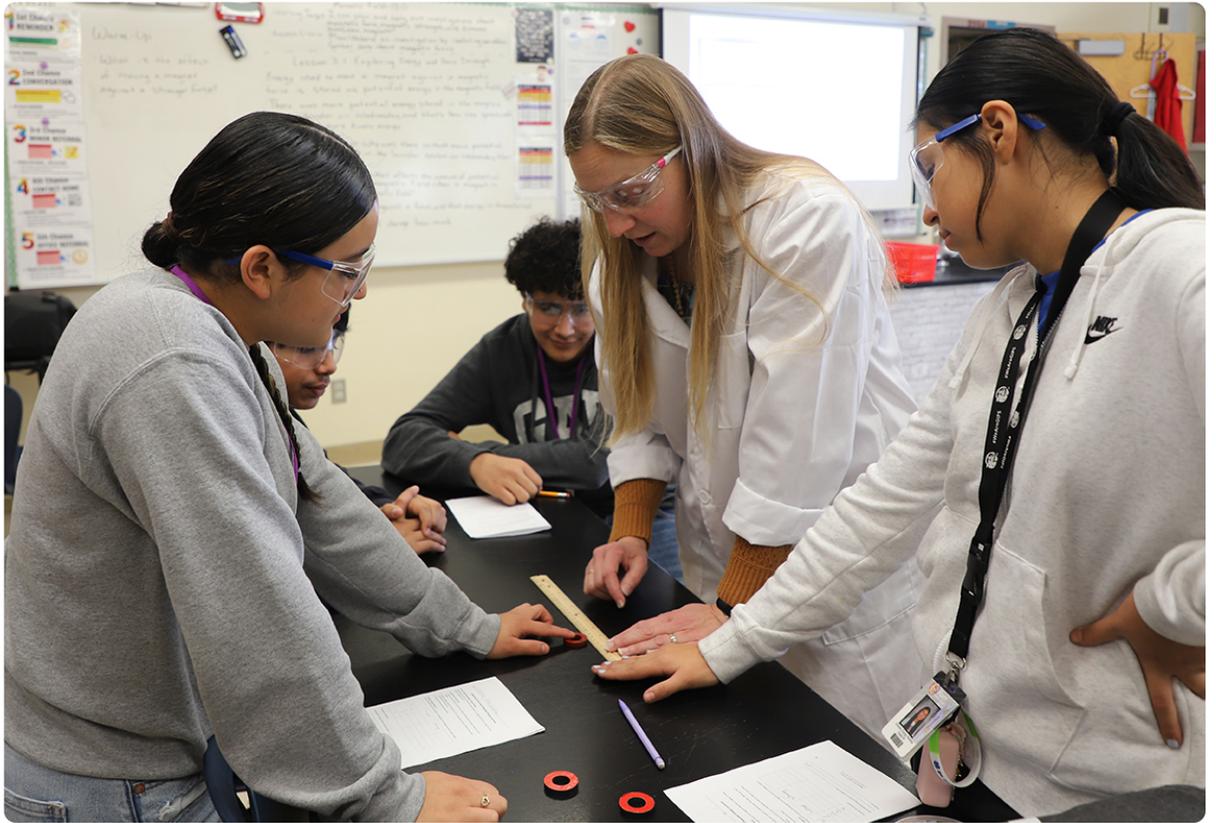


LISTEN NOW

CATCH OUR LATEST EPISODE AT [GIPS.ORG/PODCAST](https://gips.org/podcast)

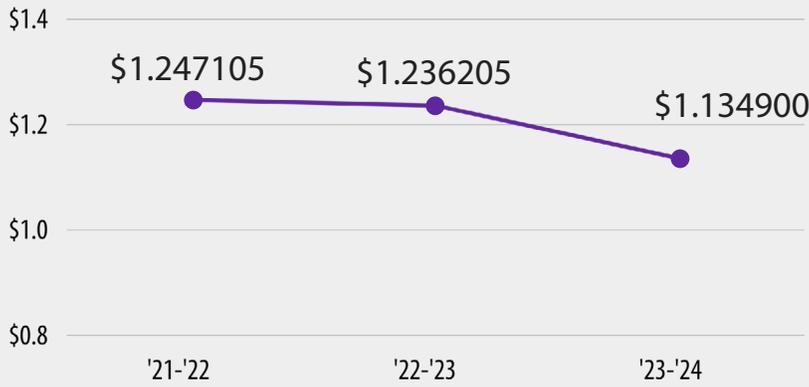


# Every Student, Every Day, A Success!



# PROPERTY TAXES LEVIED

Per \$100 of Assessed Valuation.



## 2023-2024

General	\$0.950000
Bond	\$0.134900
Building	\$0.030000
Qualified	\$0.020000

**Total Levy \$1.134900**

## PUT IT INTO PERSPECTIVE

For a \$100,000 property, the school district tax would be \$1,134.90.

## COST PER PUPIL GIPS VS STATE

Figures Based On: Average daily membership (ADM)

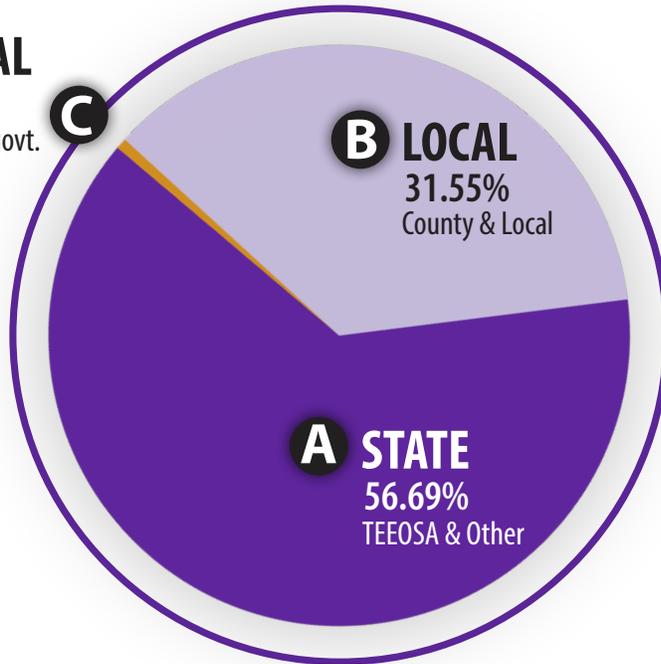
FISCAL YEAR	'23-'24
<b>GIPS</b>	\$15,807
.....	
<b>STATE</b>	\$15,899



# WHERE DOES THE MONEY COME FROM?

Total General Fund For Fiscal Year 23-24: \$145,837,154

**FEDERAL**  
11.76%  
U.S. federal govt.



## WHAT DOES THIS ALL MEAN?

**State Aid** – GIPS receives most of its funding from the state, which is controlled by the legislature.

**Local Property Tax Levy** - A school tax levy is the money the district can ask for (by School Board vote) to help support operations in our schools. This money comes from taxes people pay on their land and houses (property taxes). The local Tax Assessor decides how much a property is worth. GIPS is allowed to ask for up to \$1.05 for every \$100 of the total property value in the area to help support public school funding.

## WANT TO LEARN MORE?

### BUDGET & PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE OF GIPS

“We’re going to continue to work towards being conservatively responsible with the funds that we have, and, develop long range plans that hopefully are going to put Grand Island as a school district and as a community in a great place.”

Mr. Matt Fisher, GIPS Superintendent, joined ‘The GIPS Cast’ (Ep. 062) to give an overview on the financial health of the district.

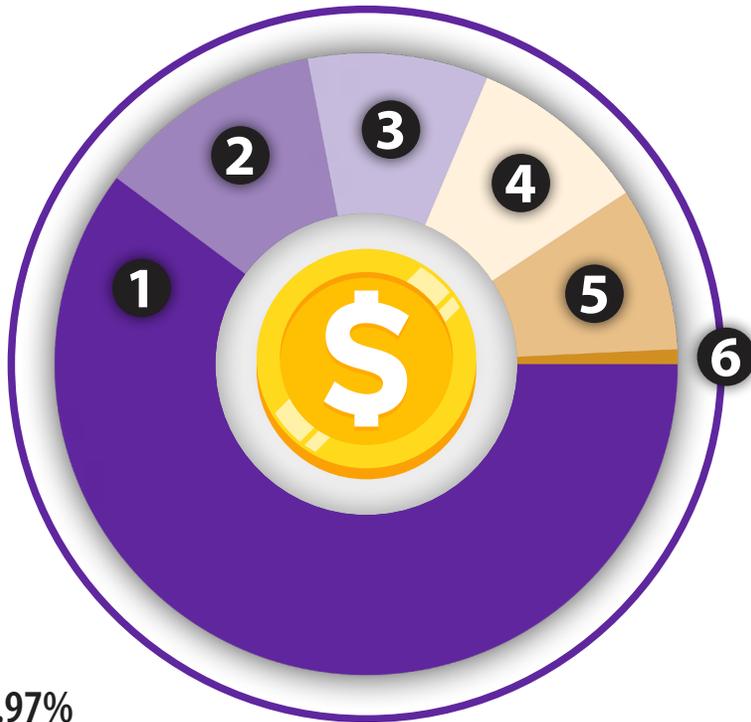


SCAN TO  
LISTEN NOW!



# WHERE DOES THE MONEY GO?

Total Expenditures for Fiscal Year 2023-2024: \$136,666,857



- 1 58.97%**  
**INSTRUCTION**  
*(Regular Instruction, English Proficiency Programs, Poverty Programs, Special Education Programs for Students Ages Birth to School Age.)*
- 2 11.53%**  
**MAINTENANCE & OPERATIONS**  
*(School Safety, Facilities Management and Upkeep, Training, etc.)*
- 3 9.16%**  
**SUPPORT SERVICES**  
*(Extracurricular Activities, Nurses, Counselors, Social Workers, Transportation, Student and Instruction Support.)*
- 4 11.22%**  
**FEDERAL PROGRAMS**  
*(GEAR UP Grant, IDEA (SPED), Title I, Migrant Education.)*
- 5 8.36%**  
**CENTRAL SERVICES, ADMINISTRATION & PRINCIPALS OFFICE**  
*(Principals, Secretaries, I.T. Support and Technology Equipment, Business Office, HR Office, etc.)*
- 6 0.75%**  
**STATE PROGRAMS & OTHER EXPENDITURES**  
*(Early Childhood Grants, Career Education, Private Grants, etc.)*



Every Student, Every Day, A Success!

# STAY IN THE LOOP WITH OUR DISTRICT CALENDAR



## '26-'27 STUDENT REGISTRATION

Online registration for the 2023-2024 school year is open from February 2 until March 31, 2026.

Visit [gips.org/registration](https://gips.org/registration) to get started today!



## GIPS EVERYDAY HEROES

Grand Island Public Schools is searching for everyday heroes to support students.

Could that be you or someone you know?

Visit [gips.org/employment](https://gips.org/employment) for job listings.



SCAN TO APPLY TODAY!





**Grand Island Public Schools**  
PO Box 4904  
Grand Island, NE 68802

The Grand Island Public Schools does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, ethnicity, sex or gender, sexual orientation, marital status or age in its programs and activities and provides equal access to the Boy Scouts. The following persons have been designated to handle inquires regarding the non-discrimination policies: Students: Associate Superintendent for Student Services, Kneale Administration Building, 123 South Webb Road, PO Box 4904, Grand Island, NE 68802-4904; 308-385-5900. Employees and Others: Director of Human Resources, Kneale Administration Building, 123 South Webb Road, PO Box 4904, Grand Island, NE 68802-4904; 308-385-5900. Complaints or concerns involving discrimination or needs for accommodation or access should be addressed to the designated Human Rights Officer. For further information about anti-discrimination laws and regulations, or to file a complaint of discrimination with the Office for Civil Rights in the U.S. Department of Education (OCR), please contact the OCR at 601 East 12th Street, Room 353, Kansas City, MO 64106, (800) 368-1019 (voice), Fax (816) 426-3686, (800) 537-7697 (telecommunications device for the deaf), or [ocr.kansascity@ed.gov](mailto:ocr.kansascity@ed.gov).