

The Groton-Dunstable Regional School District

BAROMETER

FALL 2019 EDITION

Guiding students to learn today, lead tomorrow, and reach the world

www.GDRSD.org

Schools make significant growth toward targets on state assessments



By Katie Novak

Data from the spring 2019 Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) test provides evidence that Groton-Dunstable continues to make significant growth toward achievement targets and our students perform competitively with the highest performing districts in the state.

The next-generation MCAS tests are an updated version of the MCAS tests and are administered on a computer instead of on paper (unless students have special needs that require a paper test). Students in grades 3 through 8 have been taking the next-generation tests since 2017. In spring 2019, students in grade 10 (the class of 2021) were the first class to take the next-generation high school tests in ELA and mathematics.

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Operational audit results in cost savings

By Sherry Kersey

Groton-Dunstable Regional School District solicited bids to have an Operational Audit performed in the fall of 2017. The purpose of the audit was to provide the School District with observations and recommendations of potential operational efficiencies.

The report was received in December 2017 and suggested improvements have been vetted and implemented. The changes that have been made are both fiscally responsible and operationally sound.

Facilities Management was examined and changes have been made. The School District has retained the maintenance and grounds staff, however the custodial staff has been outsourced beginning in July 2018. The process of hiring a cleaning company was undertaken through the proper procurement process leading to the award of contract to S.J Services, Inc.

The custodial staff is responsible for cleaning the buildings which includes snow removal of walk-ways in the winter. The administration works closely with S.J Services, Inc. to ensure all work is being performed as expected.

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Florence Roche rebuild planning underway

By Laura Chesson

In the December of 2018 the Florence Roche Building Committee held its first meeting and the journey leading to a renovation/re-build of the elementary school began! The Groton-Dunstable Regional School Building Committee was formed as an independent committee to act on behalf of the Groton-Dunstable Regional School District to initiate, manage, and oversee the Florence Roche Elementary School Feasibility Study in collaboration with the Massachusetts

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Upgrades to technology fuel teaching innovation

By Luke Callahan

Essential to the advancement of GDRSD's goals surrounding the creation of environments for innovation and keeping pace with advancements in digital learning, considerable technology initiatives outlined in our Strategic Technology Plan was completed this past year. Our strategic roadmap provided a framework and a time frame to complete the necessary improvements. It is exciting to share just some of the accomplishments with our community.

With the support of a capital plan approved at town meeting, as well as external infrastructure grants, sourced through the federal government and through the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, all of our schools have received major infrastructure upgrades to wireless access points, network switching, and fiber optic cabling. There were several instances where locations were relying on antiquated networking cables. As a part of the infrastructure upgrades, these locations were upgraded to the Category 6 cable standard.

Without a strong infrastructure backbone, the Department of Technology & Digital Learning wouldn't be able to support the growing demand on Internet connectivity from over 2,200 Google Chromebooks, 350 Apple iPads, 250 faculty devices, and over 100 desktop computers available in computer labs. Each day, thousands of devices connect to our network to make the best use of digital tools that are in support of our rigorous, technology-infused curriculum. With access to a strong network and updated technology tools, student-centered learning, as well as technology-enhanced learning, can be offered by our faculty. Also important to mention is the addition of wall-mounted, ultra-short-throw projectors in our classrooms. Projectors have been installed at the Boutwell Early Childhood Center all the way up to our high school classrooms, providing faculty with a great way to share information contained in lessons.

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Student Showcase



Emily Earle '21



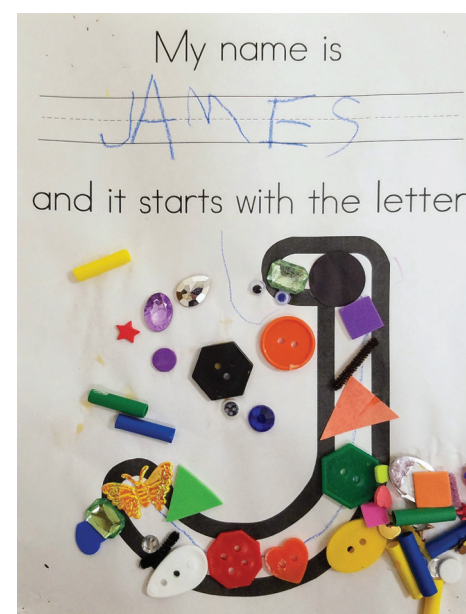
Gwen Fuellemann '21



Sara Larsen '20



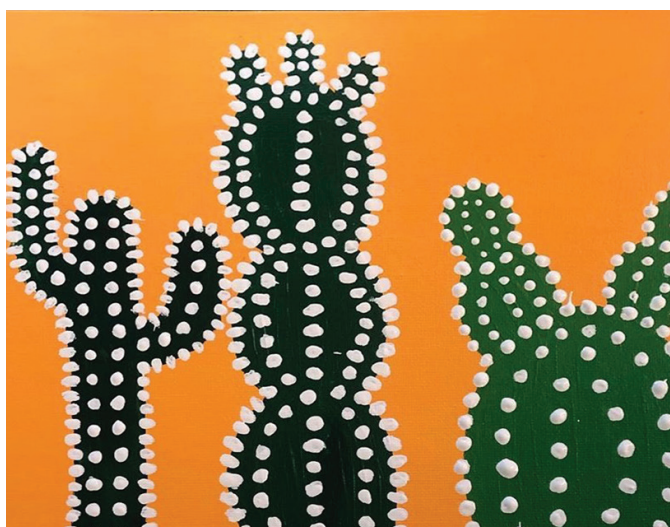
Angela Silva '21



James Mertes '33



Jessie Wang '20



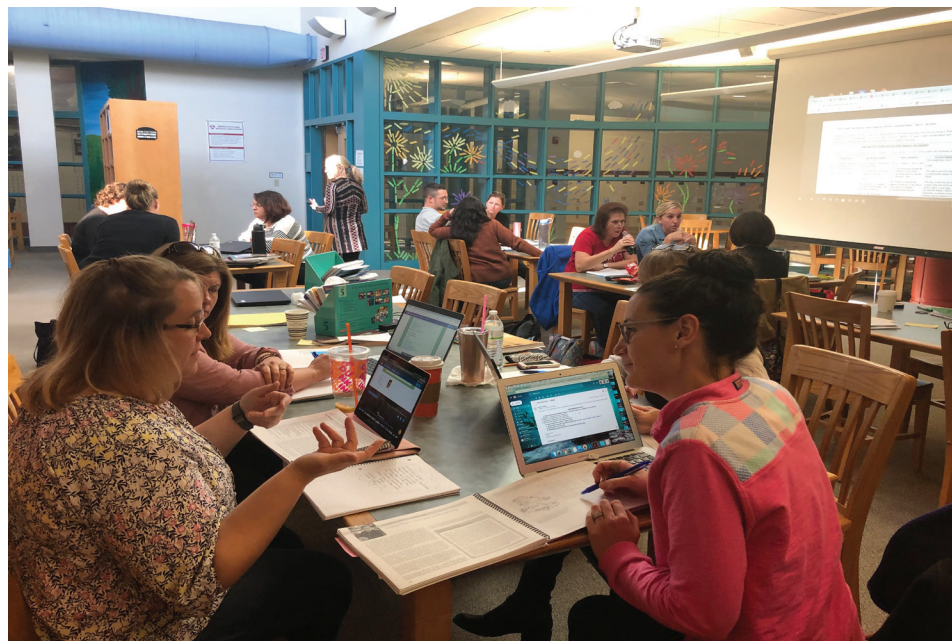
Jackie Gervais '22



Will Thompson '21

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Meeting the needs of new teachers



By Laura Taylor and Katie Novak

We recognize that beginning a teaching career is both thrilling and challenging work. Therefore, there are numerous ways that we, as a district, support our new teachers throughout the school year.

Orientation

We have a comprehensive New Teacher Induction Program that begins with all new hires, regardless of experience, engaging in a two day orientation in August. The training, which fulfills the Massachusetts Department of Education Guidelines for Induction and Mentoring Programs, is run by two veteran staff members, Laura Taylor and Caitlyn Morris. The training is focused on, but not limited to, familiarizing new staff with school procedures, school improvement plans, district strategy and district technology tools. New staff members also meet all district administrators and take a tour of the towns to gain a deeper understanding of the communities of Groton and Dunstable. Additionally, the training includes important ALICE safety information presented by Officer Mead and both of our school resource officers.

Mentoring

Teachers and staff who join our district in their first year of teaching are assigned a mentor. Mentors are carefully selected based on experience, position and licensure, and effectiveness. All mentors receive training in the skills of effective mentoring and strategies for supporting beginning teachers to be successful in a standards-based classroom. Throughout the year, mentors and mentees meet regularly to focus on instructional strategies, classroom

management and how to handle various behavioral issues, support in teaching and learning standards of the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, and support in achieving proficiency as identified in the Massachusetts Model Rubric for Teachers.

Additionally, mentees attend monthly meetings with the New Teacher Induction Coordinators to receive professional development (PD) specific to first year teaching. This high quality PD is systematic, purposeful, and structured with the goal of improving teacher practice and student outcomes. These ongoing opportunities are designed to give new teachers the tools and supports to have a successful school year as they begin teaching. Having beginning teachers meet regularly as a group also provides them the opportunity to share their experiences with colleagues.

Release time is provided for mentor and mentee to observe each other teaching so new teachers receive ongoing feedback about their practice while also having an opportunity to observe effective practices modeled by colleagues.

Evaluation

Another way that new teachers are supported is through the use of our teacher evaluation process. Evaluation provides all educators with feedback to improve professional practice and student learning through ongoing reflection and professional development. Evaluation places educators on a continuum of skill; thereby providing districts the opportunity to differentiate support for developing educators and provide opportunities to recognize effective educators through leadership roles that enhance the learning of other educators and all students in a school or district.

District Professional Development

New teachers also attend regular data meetings with grade level team members, curriculum coordinators and principals. They also participate in meetings twice a month after school with a focus on curriculum and best practices. In each of these settings, new teachers are encouraged to share classroom challenges and successes while looking at student performance.

During this first year of teaching, teachers receive approximately 150 hours of 1:1 mentoring support, group mentoring support, professional development, and support with educator evaluation. They will receive an additional 50 hours of mentoring support after the induction year.

At Groton-Dunstable, we are excited to welcome new teachers. With the support of our veteran staff and administration, new



teachers dive into the school year with enthusiasm and bring with them, a refreshing perspective. They offer innovative ideas and motivation to make a difference in the lives of our students.

Capital improvements

By Sherry Kersey

Capital Improvements are approved and funded as part of the budgeting process. For this current school year, there have been many improvements made to our facilities as an ongoing effort to maintain and responsibly manage our assets. Purchases, improvements and upgrades that have taken place over the summer include the following:

High School Track

The track was repaired and resurfaced. The request for bids was published in the Spring 2019 in order for the approved vendor to begin as soon as possible. The project was completed prior to the start of the new school year.

High School Scoreboard

A replacement scoreboard was competitively procured for the lacrosse field at the high school. The new scoreboard was able to be mounted on the existing support structure which reduced the total project costs.

High School Parking Lot Lights

The parking lot lamp posts and lights are often exposed to high winds that damage the lights. The district, working with MassSave, was able to purchase the new energy efficient light bulbs at a tremendous discount as well as a 5 year warranty.

Middle School South Flooring

This will be a two year phased

in project. The first phase included the entryway, main office area as well as cafeteria and was completed this summer. The next phase will begin during next summer and will include hallways throughout the building.

Middle School South HVAC Controls

This project entailed upgrading the HVAC Controls with both hardware and software. This will provide a more cost efficient way to monitor and manage the temperature control of the building.

Florence Roche Elementary School Accessibility Enhancement

It was determined that the handicap accessibility to Florence Roche needed to be improved. A new, wider ramp was constructed at the beginning of the school year. Additionally, a new handicap accessible swing will be installed by the end of October.

District Wide Maintenance Trucks

The replacement of maintenance vehicles are scheduled within the capital plan. When the operable fleet was compared against the district needs, it was necessary to obtain two new work trucks with plowing capability to be prepared for the upcoming winter. The trucks were procured using the state approved bid list and arrived in October.

Florence Roche

(continued from pg 1)

School Building Authority (“MSBA”), the Groton-Dunstable Regional School District, and the community as a whole. The committee is made up of school committee members, members of the school district administration, Groton & Dunstable Select Boards members, a member of the Groton Council on Aging and Groton & Dunstable Finance Committees members, and many of the committee members are also parents in our District.

The goal of the committee is to determine the most appropriate solution for the Florence Roche Elementary School in the most fiscally responsible, sustainable, flexible, and educationally appropriate manner as it progresses through the Feasibility Study process.

The work in the Feasibility Study is guided by an outside consultant called the OPM or the Owner’s Project Manager. More detailed information about the MSBA process can be found at: https://www.florencerocheproject.org/msba-module-timeline_florence-roche.pdf

The OPM for this project is Leftfield, Inc. Leftfield was established and formed in 2007. They specialize in project management, predominantly in Massachusetts, and have significant experience in the public sector working with municipalities and building authorities.

Leftfield’s staff has managed over \$1 billion in MSBA-funded projects since MSBA’s inception in 2004. As Project Managers, they work in conjunction with the Owner serving as an extension of their staff. Their pri-

mary role is to protect the Owner’s interests, to ensure that the Owner is well-served and that the established goals and objectives are met in the most efficient manner, physically and fiscally. They have established protocols and procedures that will ensure our project is delivered to the Town and School Districts’ expectations - on budget and on schedule. They have a strong background in quality control through on-site representation as well as an equally strong



Officer Pete stopped by Florence Roche to join Mrs. Taylor’s kindergarten class for morning meeting.

expertise in the engineering and commissioning of building systems.

More information about Leftfield can be found at: <https://www.leftfieldpm.com/>

The Feasibility Study is a requirement of the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) in order to qualify for state-funded reimbursement for any future building project. It is the first step in determining a long-term solution for schools not currently meeting the state’s educational facility standards.

The in-depth analysis of the current condition of the schools takes approximately 6-9 months. Upon completion of the first phase, the SBC (School Building Committee), OPM (Owner’s Project Manager) and Designer Architect will work with the MSBA on determining the long-term solution for the schools.

The second phase of the study will include the conceptual and schematic designs and drawings for the solution selected and will take an

panel to review all eight proposals. From those eight proposals, four were chosen to go on to the interview round.

On September 17th, the Designer Selection Panel chose LaVallee Bresinger, Studio G, Dore and Whittier and Perkins Will to be interviewed for further consideration. As a result of those interviews, Studio G was selected as the designer for the Feasibility study. More information on Studio G can be found at: <https://studiogarchitects.com/>.

Over the next months GDRSD, the Building Committee, Leftfield and Studio G will be holding a number of visioning sessions that will be open to the community. These vision sessions will be facilitated by David Stephens of New Vistas Design. Visioning is a process in which a variety of stakeholders document the educational program the community of Groton wishes to be provided to its students in the new Florence Roche.

More information on the educational visioning process and New Vistas can be found at: <http://www.newvistadesign.net/index.html>.

Building Committee meetings, including agendas, are posted on the district website. Meetings are open to the public and all are welcome to attend. Numerous community information nights will be held during the Feasibility Study phase and an online survey to gain information critical to the visioning process will be announced in the coming months.

For more information about the Florence Roche building project visit: <https://www.florencerocheproject.org/>

additional 6 to 12 months. The total length of time for the study is 18-24 months.

Recently the Building Committee took the next big step in the process by selecting a Designer for the project. Following MSBA guidelines a Request for Services (RFS) was filed and GDRSD received proposals from eight potential designers for consideration. Following the MSBA process, three members from the Building Committee met with twelve members of the MSBA designer selection

Scope and sequence is here

By Katie Novak

Over the course of the past year, all educators and departments in the district collaborated to create a comprehensive scope and sequence to ensure instruction is aligned to standards and horizontally and vertically aligned.

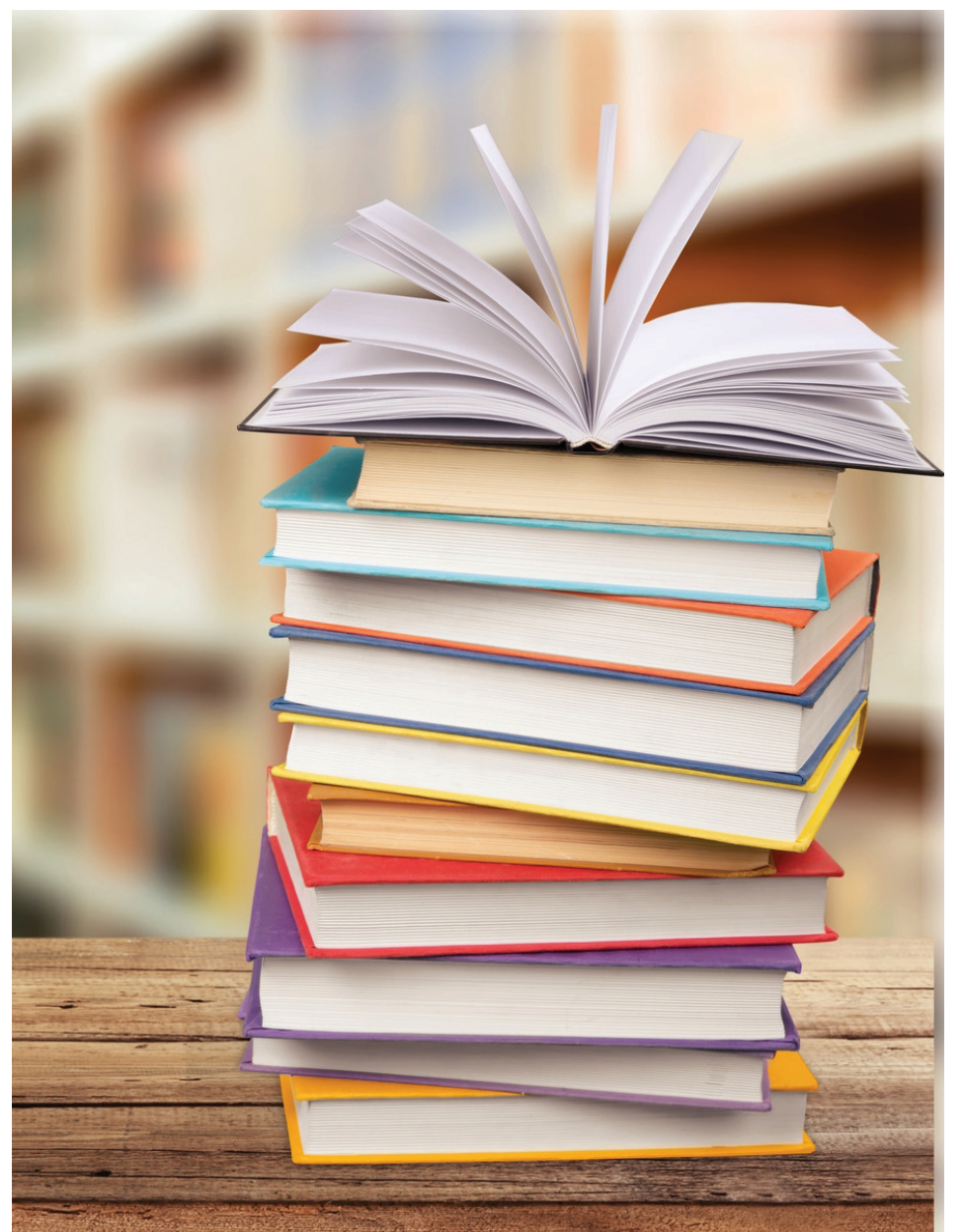
The 2019-2020 Scope and Sequence documents outline the content to be taught at a specific grade level or in a specific course and the development of the content vertically and horizontally. As community members, you can see what is being taught in each grade level in each course.

A Scope and Sequence outlines three crucial learning criteria: standards that identify what all students should know, or be able to do, at the completion of the unit of study, essential questions which reflect the key inquiries within the unit of study, and assessments designed to align to standards and help students to answer essential questions.

The development of the 2019-2020 Scope and Sequence was an incredible undertaking, as departments had to review curriculum to ensure that power standards are addressed in authentic, meaningful learning opportunities. Additionally, departments examined the progression of skills from one grade or class to the next to identify, and address any gaps in learning. As a *fun* surprise, the social studies and fine arts standards were updated in the middle of the process, so many of our courses had to be redesigned to ensure that new standards were covered in the curriculum.

What we have now is an incredible resource where all stakeholders can explore what students are learning, what essential questions they are grappling with, and how those standards are assessed. Check out the homepage and dive in: gdrsd.org/departments/curriculum/scope-and-sequence-documents/

If you know or chat with any students in our district, you can ask them about their learning and see if they can answer essential questions. Also, for a fun activity, see how many of them you can answer yourself!





Technology

(continued from pg 1)

In addition to a phone system that is reliant upon our network, as you may know, students in third and fourth grades have been working in a 1:1 Google Chromebook environment (one device for each student) for the past several years. With the success of this approach at the elementary level, this year, we adopted a 1:1 Google Chromebook program at our middle school. Google Chromebooks are known for their ease of use, low cost, and best of all support students in the latest collaborative and productivity tools, allowing for deeper engagement within all areas of the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.

Audit

(continued from pg 1)

Other recommendations included potential addition of grounds staff given the area that needs to be maintained as well as continuing to advocate for vehicle replacement through the capital plan process. These suggestions have been implemented as well.

Space Utilization was evaluated and several recommendations have been implemented. It was suggested that the Central Office be relocated from the Prescott building with several options to move within other school district buildings. After much consideration, the option of moving into Middle School South into the 4 modular classrooms was implemented in 2018. This relocation has reduced overhead by eliminating the costs involved in maintaining separate Administrative Office space including maintenance costs and utilities.

Another area carefully reviewed was the contractor expense of Regular and Special Education Transportation. Regarding Regular Transportation, it was noted that the procurement documents were appropriate, that the daily price per bus was reasonable in the current marketplace and owning/operating our own buses was not recommended. The Director of Business and Finance, Michael Knight, took the recommendations one step further and by thoroughly scrutinizing all the bus routes and in doing so was able to reduce the number of buses from 20 to 18 saving the district about \$140,000 annually.

Special Education Transportation is operating efficiently by means of outsourcing and continued sound business practices when procuring these services are the current practice.

The Food Service delivery method was also thoroughly analyzed. The school district was operating under a model in which they employed the food service staff including benefits. The audit suggested that although the self operated program was well run, it was still losing money and there was not a clear answer to bring the program to at least break even given the existing management model. One recommendation was that the district should consider outsourcing the management of this department. Through much deliberation, a model whereby an established outside contractor manages the program and current staff remained school district employees but through attrition, new staff will be hired by the management company. The management services were properly procured and the new model was implemented for this current school year under the direction of Whitson's. September profit and loss analysis shows a profit, whereas previous years at the same time period have shown a loss which indicates a great start for the food service program.

The Information Technology department was assessed for current systems and staffing levels. The infrastructure was found to be current and appropriate given a 2014 upgrade with capital outlay funding of over \$500K. Comparing staffing levels in this department is difficult due to the different roles and responsibilities at individual school districts. It was recommended to assess the low staffing level at GDRSD and determine if they have a negative impact on the technology needs of the school district. It was decided to add an additional technology support staff in this current school year to keep abreast of increasing technology requirements and not regress.

Finally, the budget and financial reporting process were analyzed. The filing of financial reports to proper state agencies were found to be timely. The budget process was inclusive of proper stakeholders and a thoughtful timeline is followed. It was suggested that the district make more use of the budget module in the software to streamline budget requests in a more efficient manner. This has been implemented while beginning to develop the FY 21 budget. The budget document was found to be comprehensive and meaningful, however there were recommendations for additions and restructuring to include items recommended by the Association of School Business Officials (ASBO) that would make the document worthy of consideration for the industry's Meritorious Budget Awards Program. GDRSD has since incorporated some of the recommendations and continues to fine tune the budget document.

Student-athletes closer to getting turf fields



By Matt Ricard

The Groton-Dunstable Regional School District is one of a handful of area schools that has yet to outfit their athletic facilities with a turf field. Converting to a turf field provides a more durable and consistent playing surface that, unlike traditional grass fields, is not as adversely affected by inclement weather conditions that result in constant schedule changes or possible cancellations. Turf surfaces do have high initial costs, but prove to be more user-friendly and cost-efficient to maintain thereafter with no need for seeding, cutting, irrigation, or repair that comes with natural grass. It is estimated that 5,500+ turf surfaces span across the country, and the Groton-Dunstable school community needs to consider how turf offers increased access and playability to its student athletes. Turf is the gold standard of playing surfaces, and currently our teams pay to play at other local facilities when turf is desired.

To date, the GD at Play group has raised over \$400k through fundraising efforts over the past few years. GD at Play is currently researching potential to form a partnership with a club soccer team, but at the moment, is in an exploration stage.

Parties who have previously donated through GD at Play have started to ask questions to the Athletic Dept. about that status of the money they contributed.

We can assure you that both the district and GD at Play continue to seek out potential grant opportunities through community preservation funds as well as continuing to explore a partnership with a private club. We will share more information as it becomes available.

Events



Students rehearse on the set of *You Can't Take It With You*, which premiered on November 1 at the High School Black Box Theatre.

November

Frozen Jr. - Middle School Production

Performing Arts Center

Friday, November 15th @ 7:00pm

Saturday, November 16th @ 2:00 and 7:00pm

- adults - \$10.00
- students/seniors - \$7.00
- veterans/active military personnel - Free



Nitsa Kanungo and Henry Vandermillen performed as Tony and Alice in *You Can't Take It With You*.

December

FloRo Holiday Fair

Performing Arts Center

(PTA event)

Saturday, December 7th

Performances by grade.

10:30, 11:15, 12:00, 12:45 and 1:30pm

\$=free

Groton-Dunstable Chamber Choir

St. Josephs

December 7th @ 5:00 pm

Middle School Band and Chorus

Performing Arts Center

Chorus

Tuesday, December 17th @ 7:00pm

(Dec 18/20 are snow dates)

\$=free

Band

Thursday, December 19th @ 7:00pm

(Dec 18/20 are snow dates)

\$=free

High School Winter Concert

Performing Arts Center

December 10th @ 7:00pm

(snow dates December 11, 12, or 13th)

January

Open Mic Night

High School Black Box Theatre

January 10th @ 6:30pm

\$=free

Swallow Union 4th Grade Concert

Swallow Union Cafeteria

January 16th @ 7:00pm

\$=free

FloRo 4th Grade Concert

Performing Arts Center

January 23rd @ 7:00pm

\$=free

Winter Show

Festival of One-Act Plays

High School Black Box Theatre

Friday January 31st @ 7:00pm

Saturday, February 1st @ 2:00pm and 7:00pm

(Snow dates - February 7th and 8th)

- regular admission - \$12.00
- students/seniors/matinée - \$10.00
- veterans/active military personnel - Free

February

FloRo 2nd Grade Concert

Performing Arts Center

February 13th @ 7:00pm

\$=free

Swallow Union 2nd Grade Concert

Swallow Union Cafeteria

February 13th @ 7:00pm

\$=free

March

Swallow Union 1st Grade Concert

Swallow Union Cafeteria

March 12th @ 7:00pm

\$=free

Open Mic Night

High School Black Box Theatre

March 13th @ 6:30 pm

\$=free

Mary Poppins Jr

Performing Arts Center

Friday, March 20th - Sunday, March

22. Evening and afternoon performances will be scheduled. Cost TBD.

FloRo 1st Grade Concert

Performing Arts Center

March 26th @ 7:00pm

\$=free

Event Locations

Groton-Dunstable High School Black Box Theatre - 703 Chicopee Row, Groton, Massachusetts 01450

Groton-Dunstable Performing Arts Center - 344 Main St, Groton, Massachusetts 01450

Swallow Union - 522 Main St, Dunstable, MA 01827

Assessments

(continued from pg 1)

When examining the performance of the district, there are two different measures: achievement and accountability. Achievement is how students perform on the MCAS exam. The state looks at student scores on these tests and the percentage of students who perform at a level that meets or exceeds grade-level expectations. From 2018 to 2019, these numbers increased in both ELA and math for when looking at the data for all students.

In 2018, when looking at the achievement of our students in grades 3-8 in ELA, the average scaled score was a 506.0 (See Figure 1) with 62% of all students meeting or exceeding expectations (M/E). In 2019, the average scaled score increased to 508.7 with 68% of all students M/E. This is compared to only 52% of the state M/E in ELA.

In math, 2018 the average scaled score was 507.8 with 62% of students M/E and in 2019, this increased to a scaled score of 510.3 with 66% of students M/E compared to 49% of the state.

In science, all three grades that are tested made significant increases in the percentage of students M/E. In grade 5, from 2018 to 2019, numbers increased from 65% to 71%. In grade 8, M/E percentages increased from 58% to 74%, and in grade 10, which is still a legacy MCAS test, students who scored proficient or advanced increased from 94% to 95%.

High school achievement scores in ELA and math can not be compared to 2018 scores because of the transition from the legacy MCAS test to the next-generation MCAS but 2019 scores indicate our students significantly outperformed the state average. In ELA, 85% of our students scored M/E compared to 61% of the state. In math, 95% of our students scored M/E compared to only 59% of the state.

When comparing high school achievement to all Market Basket districts, or districts who are most similar to Groton-Dunstable in terms of fiscal capacity and student demographics (see sidebar), we had the highest math scores across the board (Chart 1). In some cases, our high needs students (students with disabilities, English learners, and economically disadvantaged students) outperformed the “all students” cohort in our Market Basket districts.

Accountability measures look at how well the district is achieving its growth targets set by the state. Accountability measures allow districts to compete against themselves, seeing if they can grow every year. The state set specific targets for a number of different criteria including achievement, student growth percentiles, attendance, graduation rates, and student access to advanced coursework. In Groton-Dunstable, the overall accountability score was 84% over a two year period, which means that the district hit 84% of the targets set by the state. This is a two year average which weighs our overall accountability score in 2018 and 2019. In 2018, the district met 77% of all accountability targets. In 2019, this increased to 88%. Weighing 2019 60% and 2018, 40%, our overall accountability score is 84%. Groton-Dunstable shows improvement that outpaces many of our Market Basket districts. See Chart 2.

When examining detailed data for accountability, our “high needs” subgroup in grades 3-8 declined in math and science, but further analysis showed the decline was isolated to a single cohort - our current sixth grade students in the “high needs” subgroup. When the class of 2026 was in grade 4, the high needs subgroup had an average math scaled score of 501.3. In grade 5, the same subgroup declined to 490.4. This is an area of concern. The

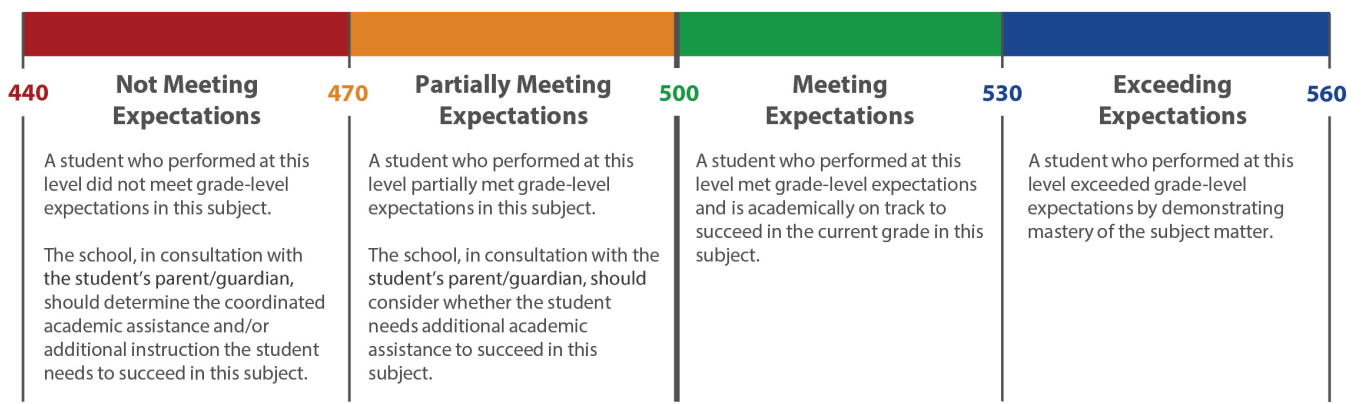


Figure 1: 2019 Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) Scale.

Grade 10 Math ALL (SGP) and Grade 10 Math High needs (SGP)

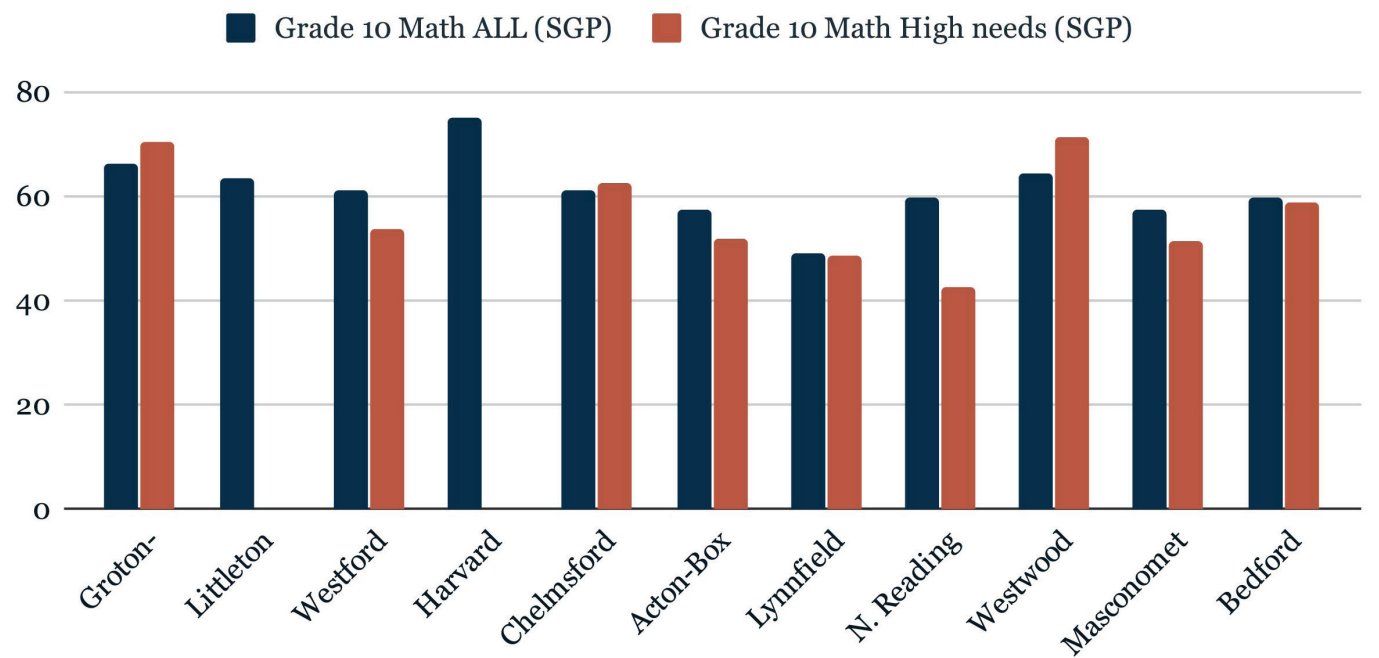


Chart 1: Grade 10 Math scores vs market basket districts.

2019 Accountability Percentages in Market Basket

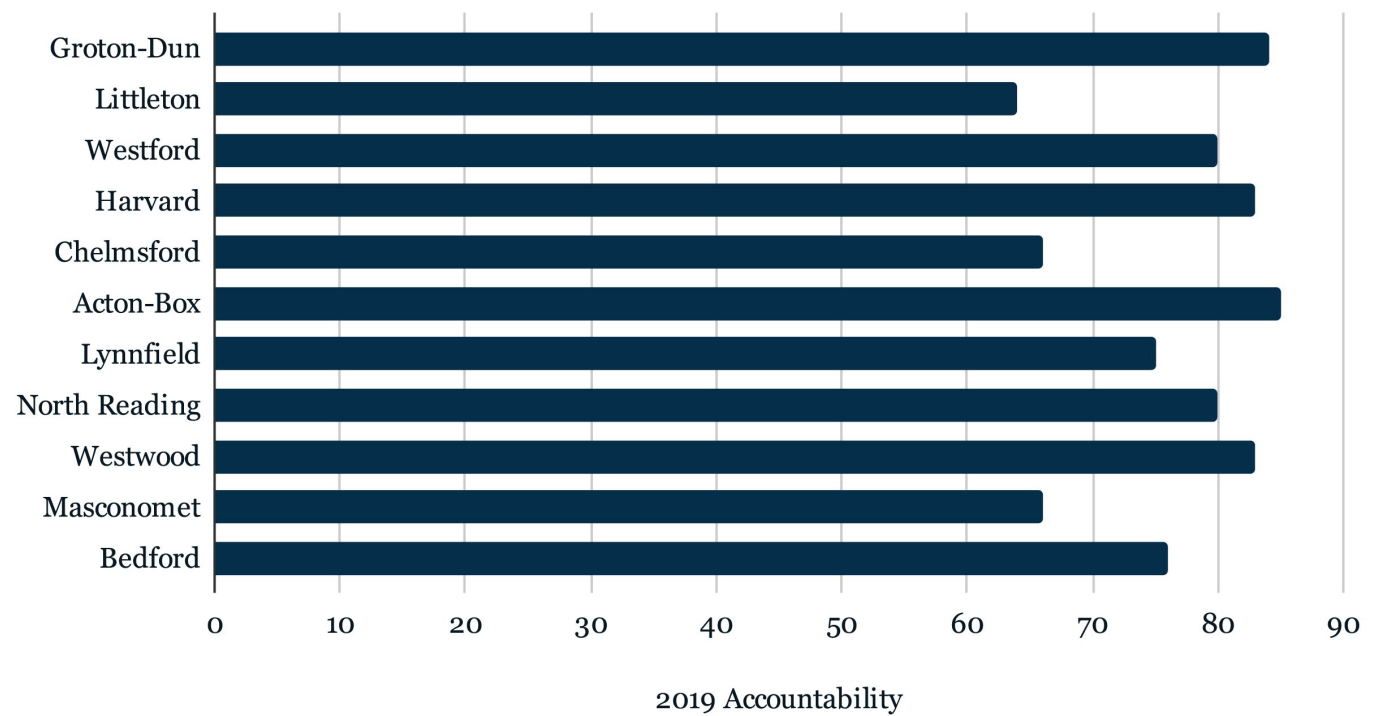


Chart 2: Accountability percentages in market basket

middle school will address this decline in ongoing data meetings and has already created an action plan, and “Watch List,” to ensure any student who experienced a decline will receive additional intervention and support.

Overall, our district is moving in a positive direction with increased performance in achievement and accountability. This growth is a testament to system changes that have been made to support the high quality of teaching and learning that happens on a day to day basis. We are so lucky to have the educators we have. For the cohort who experienced a decline, we will continually monitor their progress.

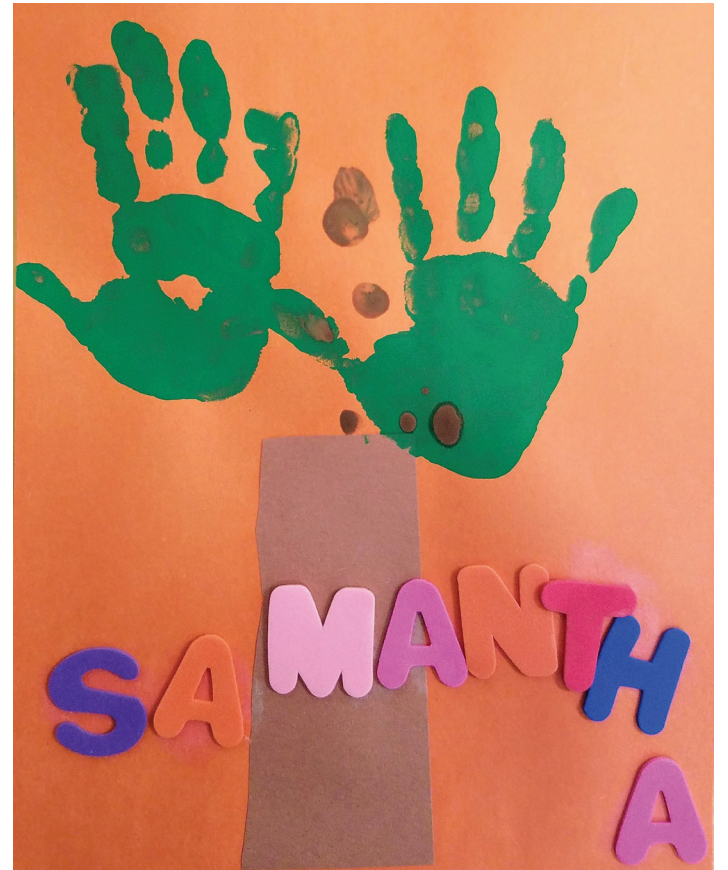
A full data presentation with more specific data analysis was presented at school committee on October 23, 2019. Community members interested in more specifics about district data can watch the archived presentation.

Market Basket Districts

- Littleton
- Westford
- Harvard
- Chelmsford
- Acton-Box
- Lynnfield
- North Reading
- Westwood
- Masconomet
- Bedford



Emily Earle '21



Samantha Kinene '34



Abby Eisenklam '20



Sara Larsen '20



Sophie Puchulu '21



Cort LaCasse '21

Lovers in the thorns

By Emma Gill

You'd think not a soul had step foot in these barren grounds. No footprints. No whispers. Only the tickle of the cold wind up your spine and the shiver of memories hidden beneath the soil. Weeds growing and intertwining at your toes pulling you closer to the earth. A cleared path lay ahead under the shelter of the tall pine trees, casting never-ending darkness to the dried up plants. But not only darkness creeps in these woods, a shine of light lingers through the trees, a subtle fireplace glistens and catches the eye of any passenger, big or small. A boy and a girl lay as one hearts dancing around the small fire lite cabin. He loves her and she loves him. At nights they rest, breath by breath, sharing the air and exchanging body heat. She shivers, he embraces. Both feeding off each other. Their minds lay blank as they rest next to one another. Dreams do not exist in these parts, at least not in the unconscious state. When you wake is when the dreams come out to play. Life is a lucid dream, able to control your steps and speech with the people you want surrounding you. Never being

alone, only if it is your desire. But in this world alone is with the person you love, you share a state of mind and without them, you're not just alone you no longer exist. This world only stays turning as the surge of love between the two lovers continues. Each day it grows and becomes even harder to break.

Its a fragile, delicate box on the inside yet dangerous and spiky on the outside. Sometimes a thorn lingers into this fragile box, a lover is pricked and starts to bleed. Vulnerable, they trust their lives to the person that shares this box, they can be saved or left to bleed. Who knows what caused this thorn to sneak in. It might have been caused by an outlier or a presence resting in between the walls. But that part doesn't matter, it is if you're helped healed faster with someone by your side. In this fragile box in the woods, these lovers fight off the thorns, protect one another and, bandage each other at the sight of the incision.

What would you like to see in the spring Barometer?

Email knovak@gdrsd.org with suggestions. Enjoy what looks to be a beautiful winter in New England.