

Visit us at: [www.gmrtd.org](http://www.gmrtd.org)

## School District Communications Guide



### Table of Contents

|                                                    |           |
|----------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Purpose of this Guide .....</b>                 | <b>2</b>  |
| <b>Recommendations to Parents .....</b>            | <b>2</b>  |
| <b>Key District Contact Information .....</b>      | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>District-Wide Communications .....</b>          | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>Preschool Practices .....</b>                   | <b>6</b>  |
| <b>Gill Elementary School Practices .....</b>      | <b>7</b>  |
| <b>Hillcrest Elementary School Practices .....</b> | <b>9</b>  |
| <b>Sheffield Elementary School Practices .....</b> | <b>11</b> |
| <b>Great Falls Middle School Practices .....</b>   | <b>13</b> |
| <b>Turners Falls High School Practices .....</b>   | <b>15</b> |
| <b>Pupil Services Practices .....</b>              | <b>18</b> |
| <b>Frequently Asked Questions .....</b>            | <b>21</b> |

Acknowledgment: Many thanks to the South Hadley School District and Superintendent Dr. Nicholas Young for allowing us to use many ideas and much language from their District Communications Guide.

## Purpose of this Guide

The Gill-Montague Regional School District is committed to working in partnership with parents, guardians, and its communities to challenge and support every one of its students. For this partnership to flourish, strong and clear systems of communication must exist. To that end, the goal of this guide is to clearly spell out what the community can expect from its schools and what the schools request from the community. The primary aim of this guide is to aid parents in the process of communicating with their students' teachers, counselors, and school administrators. It also articulates the district's specific communication goals and reminds its staff of these commitments.

## Recommendations to Parents

### Student Concerns

Concerns and problems need to be solved as they arise in order to best serve all participants, especially the student. Please encourage your child to speak to his/her teacher as soon as any problem surfaces. If your middle or high school student is uncomfortable approaching their teacher directly, guidance counselors can help facilitate a dialog between teacher and student.

### Parental Concerns

You are encouraged to follow up if your child is not satisfied or not clear about the teacher's response to his/her inquiry. Please begin with the person closest to the issue. Questions and concerns regarding a specific class can generally be answered by talking directly to the teacher. Communication with your child's teacher is welcomed and encouraged. Most issues can be resolved successfully through meaningful conversations, so we strive to keep lines of communication open. In-person conferences, telephone calls, handwritten notes, and email communications are all open to you. **All inquiries will be responded to within 48 (workday) hours.**

|                                                                          |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>First Contact --<br/>Teacher or staff<br/>member closest to issue</i> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|

|                                                    |
|----------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Second Contact --<br/>School Administration</i> |
|----------------------------------------------------|

|                                                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Third Contact --<br/>Superintendent's Office</i> |
|-----------------------------------------------------|

Please be advised that email is most appropriate for quick, uncomplicated messages to teachers or administrators when confidentiality is not a critical factor. Email is not a good avenue for communication when the requested response would be highly sensitive and/or complex in nature.

Should you need to reach a teacher with a question or concern, you may call the school office to leave a message for the teacher. All of the teachers in the district have voicemail in their classrooms. Calls received during the school day are forwarded directly to voicemail to avoid interrupting classroom instruction. If you need to speak to someone immediately please contact the school's main office and let the administrative assistant know the nature of your concern. If a conversation with your child's teacher or counselor does not address your concern you may wish to contact the school's principal or assistant principal. The front office staff will either schedule an appointment or have the principal return your call should s/he not be immediately available. If the issue cannot be satisfactorily resolved with the teacher or an administrator, your next step would be to contact the superintendent of schools to discuss your concern.

## Key District Contact Information

| Title                              | Building             | Number/Extension | Email                                                                          |
|------------------------------------|----------------------|------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Superintendent's Office            | Central Office       | 413-863-9324     | <a href="mailto:michael.sullivan@gmrdsd.org">michael.sullivan@gmrdsd.org</a>   |
| Director of Teaching and Learning  | Central Office       | 413-863-3252     | <a href="mailto:dfitzpatrick@gmrdsd.org">dfitzpatrick@gmrdsd.org</a>           |
| Director of Pupil Services         | Central Office       | 413-863-9311     | <a href="mailto:nancy.parlakulas@gmrdsd.org">nancy.parlakulas@gmrdsd.org</a>   |
| Business Office                    | Central Office       | 413-863-9325     | <a href="mailto:joanne.blier@gmrdsd.org">joanne.blier@gmrdsd.org</a>           |
| Food Service Director              | Turners Falls High   | 413-863-7315     | <a href="mailto:mistelle.hannah@gmrdsd.org">mistelle.hannah@gmrdsd.org</a>     |
| Facilities Director                | Central Office       | 413-863-3253     | <a href="mailto:james.huber@gmrdsd.org">james.huber@gmrdsd.org</a>             |
| Gill Elementary Principal          | Gill Elementary      | 413-863-7457     | <a href="mailto:conor.driscoll@gmrdsd.org">conor.driscoll@gmrdsd.org</a>       |
| Gill Elementary Office             | Gill Elementary      | 413-863-7457     | <a href="mailto:mhutchison@gmrdsd.org">mhutchison@gmrdsd.org</a>               |
| Gill Elementary Nurse              | Gill Elementary      | 413-863-7458     | <a href="mailto:carol.varner@gmrdsd.org">carol.varner@gmrdsd.org</a>           |
| Sheffield Elementary Principal     | Sheffield Elementary | 413-863-9326     | <a href="mailto:sharon.moberg@gmrdsd.org">sharon.moberg@gmrdsd.org</a>         |
| Sheffield Assistant Principal      | Sheffield Elementary | 413-863-7421     | <a href="mailto:kevin.cousineau@gmrdsd.org">kevin.cousineau@gmrdsd.org</a>     |
| Sheffield Elementary Office        | Sheffield Elementary | 413-863-9326     | <a href="mailto:cburke@gmrdsd.org">cburke@gmrdsd.org</a>                       |
| Sheffield Building Nurse           | Sheffield Elementary | 413-863-7441     | <a href="mailto:barbara.fish@gmrdsd.org">barbara.fish@gmrdsd.org</a>           |
| Hillcrest Elementary Principal     | Hillcrest Elementary | 413-863-9526     | <a href="mailto:sarah.burstein@gmrdsd.org">sarah.burstein@gmrdsd.org</a>       |
| Hillcrest Elementary Office        | Hillcrest Elementary | 413-863-9526     | <a href="mailto:mprokowich@gmrdsd.org">mprokowich@gmrdsd.org</a>               |
| Hillcrest Elementary Nurse         | Hillcrest Elementary | 413-863-2368     | <a href="mailto:jthayer@gmrdsd.org">jthayer@gmrdsd.org</a>                     |
| Middle/High School Principal       | TFHS/GFMS            | 413-863-7300     | <a href="mailto:annie.leonard@gmrdsd.org">annie.leonard@gmrdsd.org</a>         |
| Middle/High School Asst. Principal | TFHS/GFMS            | 413-863-7317     | <a href="mailto:earl.mcgraw@gmrdsd.org">earl.mcgraw@gmrdsd.org</a>             |
| Middle School Office               | Great Falls Middle   | 413-863-7300     | <a href="mailto:ndion@gmrdsd.org">ndion@gmrdsd.org</a>                         |
| Middle School Nurse                | Great Falls Middle   | 413-863-7313     | <a href="mailto:cjohnson@gmrdsd.org">cjohnson@gmrdsd.org</a>                   |
| Middle School Guidance             | Great Falls Middle   | 413-863-7320     | <a href="mailto:emily.krems@gmrdsd.org">emily.krems@gmrdsd.org</a>             |
| High School Office                 | Turners Falls High   | 413-863-7200     | <a href="mailto:sbailey@gmrdsd.org">sbailey@gmrdsd.org</a>                     |
| High School Nurse                  | Turners Falls High   | 413-863-7313     | <a href="mailto:anne.mastrototaro@gmrdsd.org">anne.mastrototaro@gmrdsd.org</a> |
| H.S. Guidance Department           | Turners Falls High   | 413-863-7203     | <a href="mailto:sgirard@gmrdsd.org">sgirard@gmrdsd.org</a>                     |
| Athletic Director                  | Turners Falls High   | 413-863-7314     | <a href="mailto:adam.graves@gmrdsd.org">adam.graves@gmrdsd.org</a>             |

## **District-Wide Communications**

### **Emergency Communications**

**Snow Closings and Delays:** School cancellation announcements are broadcast over radio stations WHAI (1240AM or 98.3FM), WHYN (93.1FM) and WHMP (93.3FM). Television stations WGGB (TV40) and WWLP (TV22) will also broadcast closings or changes in schedules.

In addition, the district will do an “all-call” to notify households via telephone of a school cancellation or delay. In the event of an emergency early dismissal, the all-call phone system would also be used.

**Other Emergency Communications:** Should the district need to get in touch with large numbers of families in an emergency situation our electronic all-call system would be used. For this reason **it is very important that parents provide the district with up to date phone contact information for work-day, evening, and cell phones.** A form requesting this information is sent home at the beginning of each school year. But if this information changes during the course of the year we ask that you please keep school main offices informed.

In addition, **email** is increasingly used as the primary means of communicating reminders of non-emergency information. Please make sure to include current emails when updating schools with contact information.

### **Procedural Communications**

(See school handbooks for additional details on these topics)

**Reporting Absences:** Each day that students are absent, parents/guardians are expected to call the school and state the reason for the absence and the estimated length of absence.

**Reporting Tardiness:** School officials will call home when a secondary student reports late to school. At the high school level, tardiness may be excused if the student presents a note explaining the reasons for being late within 24 hours of his/her return.

**Dismissal from School:** All dismissals must be in writing by the parent/guardian and presented to the school office staff before school on the date of the dismissal. In the case of a sudden reason for dismissal, a parent/guardian will need to be present in the office at the time of dismissal.

**Communications with Nurses:** Students who are ill must see the school nurse and the nurse will determine if there is a need to be dismissed. Students should not contact parents directly to consult with them about illness/dismissal.

**District and School Websites:** The district maintains a website with up to date announcements, lunch menus, calendars of events, and other news. Relatively permanent information such as school committee policies, contact information, and information about programs and curricula may be found at the district home page. In addition, each school has its own web page. These

are all updated weekly and may be found at: <http://www.gmrtd.org>

**Parent PortalPlus:** Parents may review their student's grades, attendance, and homework assignments and also receive messages and updates from teachers through this new system which has replaced *Edline*. Parents and student can see this information at any time, day or night, seven days a week, from any computer using a private password that only the parent and the student know.

When you visit the website for the first time you will be asked to "Create an Account" using the Access ID and Password you receive from the school.

You can expect that in grades 3-12 teachers will post grades weekly and homework assignments daily, or whenever assigned.

**Student Handbooks:** At the beginning of the school year each school provides its students with a detailed handbook of its policies and practices. Students and a parent sign a form acknowledging the receipt and review of this important information. You may find it serves as a useful reference during the course of the school year.

### **School Council Membership**

The School Council is an elected body of parents, teachers, and community members in each school in our district. Annual elections are held every fall in each building and parents are notified of election results by October 1<sup>st</sup>. The mission of each school council is to share ideas and resources and to help shape the direction the school will take to strengthen teaching and learning. School councils assist building principals in the following ways:

- ^ Adopting educational goals for the schools;
- ^ Identifying the educational needs of students attending the school;
- ^ Reviewing the school building's annual budget; and;
- ^ Formulating a School Improvement Plan.

To learn more about the school council at your child's school please contact the building principal.

## **Preschool Practices**

### **Preschool Open House**

In March, Hillcrest Elementary School hosts an open house for students and families of preschool age students. Parents are welcome to come and visit the classrooms, meet staff, and have any questions answered.

### **Preschool Registration**

In April, Hillcrest Elementary School holds its annual preschool registration for students who are 3, 4 and students who turn 5 years of age **after** September 1<sup>st</sup>.

### **Community Preschool Screenings**

In April, Hillcrest Elementary School provides community preschool screenings for 3 and 4 year olds residing in Gill and Montague. A screening is a brief check of how a child is developing in several areas: small & large muscle coordination, speech & language, and cognitive development. Vision & hearing screening is also available by the school nurse. These screenings are designed to feel like game playing to the screened children. A team of professionals will meet with you and your child and go over results once the screening day is completed.

To schedule an appointment call Mary Prokowich at Hillcrest Elementary School – at (413) 863-9526. This screening is sponsored by the Gill-Montague Department of Special Education & the Early Childhood Programs of Gill-Montague Regional School District.

## **Gill Elementary School Practices**

Gill Elementary School serves approximately 130 students from kindergarten through grade six and is located at 48 Boyle Road, Gill, MA 01354

### **Avenues of Communication**

#### **Open House**

In early September, Gill Elementary hosts an open house for students and their families. Parents are welcomed by the principal and have the opportunity to meet all professional staff and learn about their programs.

In addition to Open House, the following events occur:

- ⤴ PTO Events
- ⤴ Curriculum Focused Events (i.e. Math Night)
- ⤴ New Parent Orientation
- ⤴ Ice Cream Social -- The Tuesday before school starts, for children to meet their teachers.

#### **Newsletters**

A school newsletter is sent home each week electronically from the principal's office. Paper copies are distributed to students to take home and it is also posted on the school webpage. Additionally, teachers also send home monthly newsletters containing class news, curriculum information, homework reminders and classroom expectations.

#### **Principal Forums or Coffee Hours**

These are held periodically throughout the year to give parents an informal opportunity to provide feedback or ask questions.

#### **Student Communication Folders**

At *Gill Elementary* students in grades 4-6 have both a homework folder and a plan book for home school communication. The plan book contains an area for parent signatures and communication. Teachers in grade K-3 develop their own systems of communication and homework in alignment with the developmental age of their students.

#### **Conferences**

Parent conferences are held twice a year. These opportunities to meet face-to-face are invaluable and all parents are strongly encouraged to attend during both sessions. Conferences are held on half days during two afternoons in November and March and an evening session during the November dates. Please make all possible efforts to attend the conference. If you must cancel or find a need to reschedule, please contact the teacher as soon as possible.

#### **Report Cards**

Report cards are distributed three times throughout the year; in November, March, and June.

### **Parent Portal**

Student grades and/or progress report cards will be posted to *Parent Portal* at least weekly for students in grades 3-6.

### **Student Handbook**

School handbooks are distributed each year on the first day of school. They are comprehensive guides to the schools' and their policies. Extra copies are available in the main office and it is also available on the school's web page.

### **Opportunities for Participation**

Each school's **parent teacher association (PTO)** is a group of parents and teachers devoted to enriching the educational experience of elementary school students. The PTO raises money and provides volunteers for many enrichment programs and activities. The PTO offers an opportunity for parents to be involved in their child's education in many ways.

The Gill PTO meets monthly at 6:30 pm. Our PTO is open to all teachers, parents, guardians and grandparents. Attendance at every meeting is not mandatory and all are welcome whenever you can make the meetings. Meeting times are announced in our monthly newsletter. Our PTO is important to providing support for many of the family events and "extras" that make the elementary school experience so memorable. It is an excellent opportunity to meet other parents and work together on projects that benefit the entire school community. In a typical year, the PTO sponsors a read-a-thon, a family dance, a winter craft night and a spring carnival, to name just a few. Fundraising by the PTO supports vital opportunities, such as field trips and enrichment programs. Our PTO also helps to foster positive connections between the school, parents, families, and our larger community.

### **School Council**

The role of the Gill Elementary School Council is to identify and prioritize the needs of the Gill Elementary School community and to advise the principal in the development and implementation of the Gill Elementary School Improvement Plan. The Gill School Council meets regularly beginning in September. These meetings are open to the public.

The School Council is co-chaired by the Gill Elementary School Principal and a member chosen by the group at its first meeting. Council members are elected annually for two year terms. The election will take place during our Open House. Parents who have been serving on the Council are welcome to re-submit their names. The Council also has teacher and staff representatives chosen by their peers, and community volunteer representatives appointed by the Principal.

### **Volunteer Opportunities**

In addition to the PTO and school council, parents are involved as field trip chaperones and volunteers for special events. You should feel free to talk to your child's teacher or a member of the PTO about any volunteer ideas you may have or special talents you wish to share.

## **Hillcrest Elementary School Practices**

Hillcrest Elementary School serves approximately 160 students from Pre-K through grade one.

### **Avenues of Communication**

#### **Open House**

In early September, Hillcrest Elementary Schools hosts an open house for students and their families. Parents are welcomed by the principal and have the opportunity to meet all professional staff and learn about their programs.

In addition to Open House, the following events occur:

- ⤴ PTO Events
- ⤴ Curriculum Focused Events (i.e. Math Night)
- ⤴ Playground Party -- The day before school starts children can meet their teachers.

#### **Newsletters**

A monthly newsletter is sent home from the principal containing whole school news and information from teachers and staff. Paper copies are distributed to students to take home and it is also sent out via email and posted on the school webpage.

#### **Principal Forums or Coffee Hours**

These are held periodically throughout the year to give parents an informal opportunity to provide feedback or ask questions.

#### **Conferences**

Parent conferences are held twice a year. These opportunities to meet face-to-face are invaluable and all parents are strongly encouraged to attend during both sessions. Conferences are held on half days during two afternoons in November and March and an evening session during the November dates. Please make all possible efforts to attend the conference. If you must cancel or find a need to reschedule, please contact the teacher as soon as possible.

#### **Report Cards**

Report cards are distributed three times throughout the year; in November, March, and June.

#### **Student Handbook**

School handbooks are distributed each year on the first day of school. They are comprehensive guides to the schools' and their policies. Extra copies are available in the main office and it is also available on the school's web page.

### **Opportunities for Participation**

Each school's **parent teacher association (PTO)** is a group of parents and teachers devoted to enriching the educational experience of elementary school students. The PTO raises money and provides volunteers for many enrichment programs and activities. The PTO offers an opportunity

for parents to be involved in their child's education in many ways.

The Hillcrest Elementary PTO (Friends of Hillcrest) is a group of parents and teachers devoted to enriching the educational experience of elementary school students. The PTO raises money and provides volunteers for many enrichment programs and activities. The PTO offers an opportunity for parents to be involved in their child's education in many ways. All parents are welcome and encouraged to attend. Fundraising supports school field trips and the purchase of special items that benefit students.

### **School Council**

The Hillcrest Elementary School Council meets monthly from September through June. School councils were established to assist principals in planning for and implementing goals and practices that enhance the achievement of all students. The school council is an advisory body that works together to provide ideas and opinions to help the principal. In this context, council members assist by:

- providing information and recommendations relevant to the educational needs of students;
- reading and discussing the budget with the principal to understand the implications for goals and activities in the school improvement plan; and
- participating actively in the process of analysis and planning that results in the identification of annual goals, activities, outcomes, and resources that will lead to school improvement.

School councils are made up of teacher representatives, parent representatives, and community members. Parent members are to be **selected by the parents of students attending the school in elections** held by the local recognized parent - teacher organization (PTO). Elections are held at Open House.

### **Volunteer Opportunities**

In addition to the PTO and school council, parents are involved as field trip chaperones and volunteers for special events. You should feel free to talk to your child's teacher or a member of the PTO about any volunteer ideas you may have or special talents you wish to share.

## Sheffield Elementary School Practices

Sheffield Elementary School serves approximately 228 students from grade two through five.

### Avenues of Communication

#### **Open House**

In early September, Sheffield Elementary Schools hosts an open house for students and their families. Parents are welcomed by the principal and have the opportunity to meet all professional staff and learn about their programs.

In addition to Open House, the following events occur:

- ⤴ PTO Events
- ⤴ Curriculum Focused Events (i.e. Math Night)
- ⤴ Playground Party -- The day before school starts children can meet their teachers.

#### **Newsletters**

A monthly newsletter is sent home from the principal containing whole school news and information from teachers and staff. Paper copies are distributed to students to take home and it is also sent out via email and posted on the school webpage.

#### **Principal Forums or Coffee Hours**

These are held periodically throughout the year to give parents an informal opportunity to provide feedback or ask questions.

#### **Conferences**

Parent conferences are held twice a year. These opportunities to meet face-to-face are invaluable and all parents are strongly encouraged to attend during both sessions. Conferences are held on half days during two afternoons in November and March and an evening session during the November dates. Please make all possible efforts to attend the conference. If you must cancel or find a need to reschedule, please contact the teacher as soon as possible.

#### **Report Cards**

Report cards are distributed three times throughout the year; in November, March, and June.

#### **Parent Portal**

Student grades and/or progress report cards will be posted to *Parent Portal* at least weekly for students in grades 3-5.

#### **Student Handbook**

School handbooks are distributed each year on the first day of school. They are comprehensive guides to the schools' and their policies. Extra copies are available in the main office and it is also available on the school's web page.

## **Opportunities for Participation**

Each school's **parent teacher organization (PTO)** is a group of parents and teachers devoted to enriching the educational experience of elementary school students. The PTO raises money and provides volunteers for many enrichment programs and activities. The PTO offers an opportunity for parents to be involved in their child's education in many ways.

The Sheffield Elementary PTO is a group of parents and teachers devoted to enriching the educational experience of elementary school students. The PTO raises money and provides volunteers for many enrichment programs and activities. The PTO offers an opportunity for parents to be involved in their child's education in many ways. All parents are welcome and encouraged to attend. Meetings are usually after school or in the evening on the first Thursday of each month. The PTO sponsors events such as an annual Halloween Party, a Valentine's Day party, and an End of the Year Party. Fundraising supports these events as well as contributions to school field trips and the purchase of special items that benefit students.

### **School Council**

The Sheffield Elementary School Council meets monthly from September through June. School councils were established to assist principals in planning for and implementing goals and practices that enhance the achievement of all students. The school council is an advisory body that works together to provide ideas and opinions to help the principal. In this context, council members assist by:

- providing information and recommendations relevant to the educational needs of students;
- reading and discussing the budget with the principal to understand the implications for goals and activities in the school improvement plan; and
- participating actively in the process of analysis and planning that results in the identification of annual goals, activities, outcomes, and resources that will lead to school improvement.

School councils are made up of teacher representatives, parent representatives, and community members. Parent members are to be **selected by the parents of students attending the school in elections** held by the local recognized parent - teacher organization (PTO). Our school council has generally met at 6:00 P.M. on the second Thursday of each month.

### **Volunteer Opportunities**

In addition to the PTO and school council, parents are involved as field trip chaperones and volunteers for special events. You should feel free to talk to your child's teacher or a member of the PTO about any volunteer ideas you may have or special talents you wish to share.

## **Great Falls Middle School Practices**

Great Falls Middle Schools serves approximately 221 students in grades six through eight. The school shares its building with Turners Falls High School at 222 Turnpike Road Montague, MA 01351.

At Great Falls Middle School the *Welcome Breakfast* and *Open House* provide the initial opportunities for you to establish a relationship with your child's teachers. All teams send letters over the summer to acquaint parents and students with the expectations of the team. However, you should call your child's teacher immediately with concerns, questions, or just to check on progress. If you wonder about issues such as homework, assessment results, classroom expectations, or behavior, the teacher is the one who can most likely address your concerns. In most instances a brief phone call will lead to understanding and resolution. Parents also have access to email for teachers and can monitor their child's academic progress through our *Parent Portal*. If necessary, meetings can be arranged with the team leader.

### **Avenues of Communication**

#### **Open House**

Great Falls Middle School holds an Open House for parents in the fall. Open House differs from individual conferences in that it enables parents to meet their child's teacher, view materials to be used during the year, tour the school, and become acquainted with the structure of the school day. Open House begins with a meeting in the theater when parents learn about different parent groups they may become involved with to support their child. Open House is generally held in the month of September.

#### **Newsletters**

At the middle school we write a monthly newsletter that is emailed to parents and posted on the school webpage. It is also available in print, when requested. Included in the newsletter are upcoming important dates, a letter from the principal, and news from teacher's classrooms.

#### **Principal Forums or Coffee Hours**

These are held periodically throughout the year to give parents an informal opportunity to provide feedback or ask questions.

#### **Conferences**

Parent conferences are held twice a year; once in the fall and once in the spring. Teachers contact parents to set up appointments, which run about twenty minutes. Due to the number of parents not all parents are contacted for a conference. However, any parent that wants to meet with teachers can contact the team leader to set up an appointment during the team's regular meeting time.

#### **Parent Portal**

Parents may learn about their student's grades, curricula, and receive current information from teachers by accessing their portal account. Teachers update grades weekly and update homework assignments on a daily basis.

### **Report Cards**

Great Falls Middle School issues report cards four times during the school year, which is approximately every ten weeks. Mid-term progress reports are not sent home, as the Parent Portal now provides up to date student performance information to parents.

### **Student Planners**

At the beginning of the school year all students are issued planners. The planners are used for students to record homework assignment. At the front of the planners parents will find the student handbook. Some parents work with teachers to use the planner as a form of communication to supervise their child's homework completion.

### **Opportunities for Participation**

In addition to the ways listed below, the middle school staff is always interested in exploring other ways to expand parental involvement. Please contact the school administration with interests or suggestions.

**School Council-** every year the middle school solicits parents to build a school council. The school council helps guide the priorities for the school and build a School Improvement Plan based on the District Improvement Plan and the needs specific to the middle school.

**Music Boosters-** we welcome parents to become involved with Music Boosters. It is a parent organization that supports the music programs of the middle and high school of the district. Parents will hear more details at Open House.

**Sports Boosters-** parents are also welcome to get involved with Sports Boosters which is a parent organization that supports our student athletes and the athletic programs at GFMS.

### **Parent Teacher Organization**

The Great Falls Middle School Parent Teacher Organization enriches the educational experience of our students by supporting school activities. The PTO is committed to parent and community outreach and arranging activities to cultivate relationships in the school community. All parents and guardians are welcome and encouraged to attend meetings. The PTO has sponsored a Red Sox bus trip along with a free spaghetti supper and middle school talent show. Our fundraising efforts support these events as well as providing contributions to end of the year festivities, teacher appreciation treats and other items to benefit the staff and students of GFMS. Please follow the PTO on Facebook to stay up to date with meeting dates and planned activities. <https://www.facebook.com/GFMSPTO>.

## **Turners Falls High School Practices**

Turners Falls High School serves approximately 262 students in grades nine through twelve. The school shares its building with Great Falls Middle School and is located at 222 Turnpike Road, Montague, MA 01351.

At the high school level, if contacting a specific teacher does not prove satisfactory please use these guidelines:

- Each extracurricular activity has a faculty advisor to whom you may address questions.
- If questions involve course selection and placement, you should contact your child's guidance counselor. The guidance or adjustment counselor can act as a mediator between parents/students and staff, and acts as a link within the school to keep all necessary departments and staff members informed when there is a concern about a particular student.
- If issues are administrative in nature or deal with the broader issues of school policy, you should first contact the assistant principal. He/she can address your questions or can lead you to other adults in a position to help you. The main office staff is also helpful in directing your questions to the appropriate person. The principal remains available at all times should you need further administrative help.
- If your questions concern your student's overall educational program or his/her social and emotional growth, you can contact your child's guidance counselor or, when appropriate, his/her Special Education liaison.
- Calendar information is available through the Main Office, TFHS publications, and district/school web sites.

### **How do I establish a relationship with my child's teachers?**

At TFHS call your child's guidance counselor immediately with concerns or questions. At the high school the guidance counselor is the person who can best answer your inquiries and, if necessary, can arrange meetings with one or several teachers or administrators. Please be aware that it is not always possible for teachers to be immediately available for a conversation or a meeting. However, if you leave a message the teacher will return your call within 48 hours.

### **Avenues of Communication**

#### **Open House**

Turners Falls High School holds an open house for parents on a weeknight each September. Open House begins with a meeting in the theater where parents hear about the school's overall program from the administrative team. This introduction is followed by time to visit students' teachers and programs throughout the building.

#### **Conferences**

All parents and guardians are encouraged to attend parent-teacher conferences during days set aside for this purpose each November and April. Either parents or teachers may request a conference. Conferences are scheduled through the high school guidance office.

**Parent Portal:** Parents may learn about their student's grades, curricula, and receive current

information from teachers by accessing their portal account. Teachers update grades weekly and update homework assignments on a daily basis.

### **Report Cards**

These are issued at the end of each quarter; in early November, late January, early April and in June.

### **Principal Forums or Coffee Hours**

These are held periodically throughout the year to give parents an informal opportunity to provide feedback or ask questions.

### **Newsletters:**

TFHS mails a quarterly newsletter home to each student household. These newsletters are an important means of communication to keep families informed of various school activities and significant milestone events. These include things like SAT test dates, college application deadlines, athletic events, letters from the administrative team, news from academic departments, and other special features.

### **Opportunities for Participation**

**School Council** - The school council helps guide the priorities for the school and build a school improvement plan informed by the district improvement plan and the needs specific to the high school. Parent volunteers serve on the school council along with high school faculty and the principal. Please contact the main office at (413) 863-7200 for more information.

Listed below are some of the ways parents can be involved at Turners Falls High School:

- ⤴ Never underestimate the importance of attending events in which your student is a participant, whether it is sports, drama, music, etc. Not only is your presence a powerful statement to your student, it provides opportunities for you to learn what your student has been working on and to meet other parents.
- ⤴ Attend your child's individual meetings.
- ⤴ Parents of student athletes can attend seasonal athletic events and are encouraged to join **Sports Boosters** -- a parent organization that supports our student athletes and the athletic programs at the middle and high school.
- ⤴ Parents can also attend the winter and spring concerts, our annual Musical Performance, and bi-annual Art Fair. We also encourage parents to become involved in **Music Boosters** -- a parent organization that supports the music programs of the district's middle and high school.
- ⤴ Parents of NHS (National Honor Society) students can attend the evening honors convocation ceremony and support their scholars' in their community service obligations.

## **Student Support**

It is in your student's best interest to get to know his/her guidance counselor and you can help by encouraging your child to stay in contact with his/her counselor as questions arise. You can also call your child's counselor at any time. Check the TFHS [Program of Studies](#) to find out graduation requirements so that you can assist your child in planning the courses he/she should take during his/her four years at TFHS. Encourage your child to talk to his/her counselor if difficulties in any area of life at TFHS arise. A Special Education liaison, if your child has an Individualized Education Plan, can also be of assistance in curricular areas of concern.

## **College Information for Students at TFHS**

Your student's guidance counselor will be your primary source for information about college. This search process becomes very active beginning in your child's junior year. Here are some milestone events each year:

- Turners Falls High School hosts a Junior College Information Night
- A Financial Aid seminar for parents is also held at TFHS in the fall
- In January we have College Goal Sunday in which financial aid experts are here to help parents complete the FAFSA form on the computer
- Mid-year we have a student panel of post graduates to talk with seniors
- Many college representatives visit our school throughout the first half of the year. Students can sign up to meet with representatives at each presentation
- Resume writing workshops are also available for college applications.

Look for news of these events in our newsletters and on our website!

## **Pupil Services Practices**

### **Who works for the Pupil Services office?**

The Pupil Services office is staffed by the director of pupil services, building-level special education team chairs, and administrative assistants. The office is located at 35 Crocker Ave, Turners Falls, MA 01376.

### **What services does the Pupil Services office support?**

**New student registrations**, except for preschool, occur at this office. Please call for information or to make an appointment at 413-863-4001.

The Pupil Services office is responsible for district compliance with requirements for educating certain learners' including:

- ⤴ Students with disabilities who have Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)
- ⤴ Students who are English Language Learners (ELL)
- ⤴ Students on 504 Plans
- ⤴ Students who are homeless
- ⤴ Home schooled students
- ⤴ Out-of-District Placements
- ⤴ Special Education Transportation

### **Special Education Child Find Notice**

Under federal and state special education regulations, Gill-Montague Regional School District has a duty to locate, identify, refer, evaluate and, if eligible, provide a free, appropriate public education to students with disabilities who reside in the Gill-Montague Regional School District.

The Gill-Montague Regional School District understands that it must ensure that an IEP or, at the option of the school district, an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) is in effect for eligible children by a child's third birthday. The school district also provides a full continuum of services and placements for students with disabilities eligible for special education aged three through twenty-one who have not attained a high school diploma or its equivalent.

For parents or guardians of children ages 3-21 years of age, who are suspected of having a disability, and who would like more information about special education, obtaining a copy of the Notice of Procedural Safeguards and/or a copy of the Gill-Montague Regional School District's Special Education Program Plan Statement, please contact:

Karen Regis, Special Education Team Chair, 413-863-7514; karen.regis@gmrds.org

TBA, Special Education Team Chair, 413-863-7209;

Nancy Parlakulas, Director of Pupil Services, 413-863-4001;  
nancy.parlakulas@gmrds.org

### **504 Child Find Notice**

Pursuant to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which prohibits discrimination in publicly funded activities the Gill-Montague Regional School District has a duty to identify refer, evaluate, and if eligible, provide access to public education to student with impairments in its jurisdiction. For additional information about the rights of parents of eligible children, or for answers to any questions you might have about identification, evaluation and placement into Section 504 programs, please contact:

Sharon Moberg, 504 Coordinator Montague Elem. School, 413-863-9326;  
[sharon.moberg@gmrds.org](mailto:sharon.moberg@gmrds.org)

Conor Driscoll, 504 Coordinator Gill Elem. School, 413-863-7457;  
[conor.driscoll@gmrds.org](mailto:conor.driscoll@gmrds.org)

Annie Leonard, 504 Coordinator TFHS, 413-863-7202;  
[annie.leonard@gmrds.org](mailto:annie.leonard@gmrds.org)

Emily Krems, 504 Coordinator GFMS, 413-863-7320;  
[emily.krems@gmrds.org](mailto:emily.krems@gmrds.org)

Nancy Parlakulas, 504 District Coordinator, 413-863-9311;  
[nancy.parlakulas@gmrds.org](mailto:nancy.parlakulas@gmrds.org)

### **Youth in Transition**

The federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act requires that school districts immediately enroll homeless students in school, even if they do not have the documents usually required for enrollment, such as school records, medical records or proof of residency.

Homeless students have a right to either remain in their school of origin or to attend school where they are temporarily residing.

If a student chooses to remain in the school in which s/he was enrolled and is living in a town other than the town in which that school exists, these two towns are responsible for cost sharing the expenses for transportation.

Homelessness is defined as anyone who lacks fixed regular and adequate nighttime residence. This includes: Shelters and motels; On the street, cars, parks,....; Doubling up due to Economic hardship, loss of housing or similar reason; Unaccompanied youth; Awaiting foster care. Students who are homeless have an automatic right to free breakfast and lunch.

Information regarding Homeless Education Assistance please contact:

Nancy Parlakulas, Homeless Liaison, 413-863-9311; [nancy.parlakulas@gmrds.org](mailto:nancy.parlakulas@gmrds.org)

Information on the Office for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth:

Sarah Slautterback, State Staff Specialist, 781-338-6330; [sslautterback@doe.mass.edu](mailto:sslautterback@doe.mass.edu)

For additional information from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, please go to [www.doe.mass.edu/mv/](http://www.doe.mass.edu/mv/).

### **English as a Second Language**

ELL teachers work closely with the Director of Student Services, principals, guidance counselors, classroom teachers, and other support staff to provide meaningful language and academic support to their students. For information regarding the English Language Learner Program, please contact:

Rebecca Wright, ELL Coordinator, 413-863-3258; [rwright@gmrtd.org](mailto:rwright@gmrtd.org)

### **Special Education Parent Advisory Council**

The Pupil Services office communicates with parents in a variety of ways. This department holds regularly scheduled meetings with the district's Special Education Parent Advisory Council (Special Ed. PAC). This council is made up of special education parents and provides a support network for families, a vehicle for feedback to the district, and a communications channel between the district and families. The Pupil Services office can provide information to parents interested in contacting or joining the Special Ed. Pac.

The Gill-Montague Regional School District Parent Advisory Council is a group of parents living in Gill-Montague who have an interest in special needs support and education in our town, and who are dedicated to providing information, recommendations and friendships to families in Gill-Montague who have children with special needs and are looking to make some connections.

Across the state and district, over 15% of students have identified learning differences and have Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) or 504 plans. You are not alone and you shouldn't have to feel that way. We are here to help and support you. Please consider attending a meeting, or contact us by phone or email. We'll be happy to help any way we can. If you are interested in volunteering, attending a meeting, reaching out for resources or joining our mailing list, please contact us at:

April Reipold, Special Ed. PAC Chair

## Frequently Asked Questions

**1. How can I find out when half days and no school days occur?**

School calendars are found on the district website and are sent home each fall.

**2. How do I log in to *PortalPlus*? What is my *PortalPlus* log-in code?**

When you visit the website for the first time you will be asked to “Create an Account” using the Access ID and Password you receive from the school.

**3. How do I find out what bus my child takes or if s/he is eligible to ride the bus?**

Parents may call Kuzmeskus Bus Co. directly at 863-2595. They can tell if family lives within the 1.5 mile range of bus eligibility as well as provide bus assignment and route information.

**4. Cafeteria questions- What is for lunch? Is there salad bar? What is my account balance? How do I put more money into my account? Am I eligible for free or reduced lunch?**

The school lunch menu is listed on our website. Account balances for prepaid lunches may be checked using student ID numbers at the website *www.mySchoolBucks*. Other inquiries can be directed to the Food Services Office at 863-7315.

**5. How do I contact my student’s teacher?**

During the school day, school administrative assistants will transfer you to the teacher’s voice mail and provide you with her/his email address.

**6. If I have an urgent matter, whom do I call?**

If you need to speak to someone immediately please contact the school’s main office and let the administrative assistant know the nature of your concern.

If you would like this document translated please contact:

Si usted desea que este documento sea traducido por favor contáctese:

Rebecca Wright, English Language Learner Coordinator, [413-695-9593](tel:413-695-9593)  
[rwright@gmrtd.org](mailto:rwright@gmrtd.org)