

Community Connections

Within our growing, diverse community we sow the seeds of opportunities to raise prepared, resilient students.



Gervais School District

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Gervais High School

Homecoming Provides 'Sense of Community, Normalcy, and Spirit'



The 2021-22 school year at Gervais High School will undoubtedly be full of seemingly normal high school events that hold a deeper meaning than ever before, after the pandemic canceled so many in-person activities last year.

One of the more notable examples is Homecoming Week. Held the week of Oct. 4, the high school found multiple ways to get students in the school spirit. The most inclusive way was probably the daily spirit assemblies.

"Each class tried to yell out the others in spirit chants," Andrew Aman, assistant principal, said. "The juniors were by far the loudest bunch!"

"The karaoke this year made it unique."

— Lauren Ferschweiler

Tuesday night's festivities included a Powderpuff football game. Thursday night's homecoming game against Culver ended in a loss, but festivities still continued with a postgame bonfire. The week was capped off by the homecoming dance on Friday night.

"It was everyone's dance after COVID," said student Diego Contreras.



"Being with my friends was special."

— Juan Esquivel

"Everyone had a chance to connect and have fun in high school again, especially for those who missed out freshman year."

The entire week provided a bonding experience that many relished but had missed out on.

Having missed it for a year, the return to a long-lived tradition made this year's homecoming week sweeter than ever.

"After a year of missing out on traditions at Gervais High School, it was amazing to have the Gervais High School family back together," Aman said. "Homecoming week provided a sense of community, normalcy, and spirit that students haven't had in a long time."

TEACHER SPOTLIGHT

Sterling Roberts

Meet Sterling Roberts! Mr. Roberts is the new choir teacher for both Gervais Middle School and Gervais High School.

Mr. Roberts most recently came to Gervais from Independence Elementary School, where he was the general music teacher. But directing a high school choir has always been his goal.

Mr. Roberts said he's wanted to be a teacher his whole life, in part because his dad was one, but it wasn't until he was in high school when he started to get an idea of what subject he wanted to teach.

"It was then I did choir for the first time," he recalled. "I was a shy kid, but through that, I was in honor choirs throughout the state. I saw the possibilities music can bring for those who are really passionate and dedicated."

Mr. Roberts studied vocal performance at University of California, Irvine, where he graduated with a Bachelor of Music. Before going to graduate school, Mr. Roberts decided to try out for various choirs. Performing with the chamber singers from the Mount San Antonio College, which is known for its strong choral and a capella programs, was a highlight, as he had the opportunity to travel around the country and the world, performing in acclaimed venues such as Carnegie Hall, and traveling as far as Guangzhou, China. "For me, that was the point I felt 'I made it,'" Mr. Roberts said.

But grad school was calling, and Mr. Roberts moved on to Portland State



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Message from the Superintendent

With the 2021-22 school year already underway, the Gervais School District is prepared to share a survey for all students, parents, and staff called YouthTruth. The dates for the survey are November 1-19.

This is the second year of conducting this survey, which is used to gather information regarding school needs and helps guide district and school administration decisions.

It's important for people to engage in the surveys so we as a district know what is important, what is working and where we can improve. We used all of the data we received last year to create the funding priorities for the general fund and our many grants. For example, we added a 6-12 choir teacher and more counseling, as those were things that were identified as important. We also heard there was a desire for more elective opportunities for middle school students, and we added those for this year.

I think there were some important revelations that we, as a district, needed to really consider. One example was staff perception that instruction was engaging, but according to survey results from students and families, that was an area that needed improvement. We also learned that both students and parents are asking for increased rigor in academics.

The survey is anonymous and confidential, and is available in three languages: English, Spanish, and Russian.

We set up the students to take the survey using their Chromebooks, either during homeroom or advisory classes. Staff is invited to take the survey during their non-teaching time, and parents receive links in their emails to take the survey.

YouthTruth collects the data and then generates the reports into different categories. The categories include student engagement, school culture, and relationships. All questions fall into one of these three categories and then we are able to drill down into the data to identify how specific subgroups answered.

Last year, we shared the results with parents via "15 Days of Data," a 15-day educational campaign where each building shared something they learned from the survey over 15 days.

Youth Truth is a national nonprofit whose focus is on the importance of student and stakeholder voices and using that feedback to make education relevant for all students. YouthTruth has been engaging in survey work since 2008. During that time they have administered



Gervais Middle School

Sixth and Seventh Graders Enjoy Outdoor School

The 2021-22 school year has started off in an exciting way at Gervais Middle School, with the first class of sixth-graders since 2010 to be able to experience Outdoor School.

Fifty of the school's 61 sixth-graders participated in Outdoor School at Canyonview Camp outside Silverton early in October. Over three days, students left the school after breakfast and came back around 6 p.m., spending their time at the day camp participating in field studies that included:

- Fishing
- Macrobiotics
- Lewis and Clark Escape Room
- Rockets
- Horses
- Archery
- Nature Hike



Students also could choose between various activities during Adventure Time, which included games and even a zip line.

"We had a great time," said Cheryl Blanchard, sixth-grade teacher who oversaw Outdoor School.

"We were really impressed with the staff at Canyonview," said principal Bob Martin. "They did all the instruction and had it all set up. The students were so excited. The rain didn't dampen their spirits at all."

Even more exciting than almost an entire class of sixth-graders going to Outdoor School? A whole class of seventh-graders going too!

"They're going at the end of the month because they didn't get to go last year (because of COVID)," Martin said.

Approved by voters in November 2016, Measure 99 established a permanent source of funding for outdoor school through the OSU Extension Service, so that every Oregon school student could have the opportunity to benefit from a hands-on week of science-based outdoor education in fifth or sixth grade.

What's in store for Gervais Outdoor School attendees in the future? It's possible an overnight component could be added in the coming years.

"It's a big deal," Martin said. "A fair number haven't even gone fishing before."

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Gervais Elementary School

Transforming Gervais Elementary into a STEAM School

Gervais Elementary School has just started its third year as a designated STEM Transformation School. This means the school is one of a select few around the state that partner with regional hubs specializing in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). Gervais Elementary's partnerships with the Portland Metro STEM Partnership and the South Metro-Salem STEM Partnership provide the school with funds for purchasing supplies and support for staff, including building staff competency and willingness to engage in STEM learning.



So far, the school has received over \$50,000 in grant funds.

GES has gone a step further with the acronym by calling it STEAM, the "A" standing for art.

Paraphrasing the school's STEAM mission statement, Principal Dr. Creighton Helms said, "We fundamentally believe that the 21st century skills that our students will need is effectively done through the lens of the STEAM-based education."

He adds that they also believe STEAM increases classroom engagement.

So what does STEAM in action look like?

Some examples include:

- LEGO Robotics Club
- GirlsWhoCode Club
- ROADS To Mars Team
- A collection of codable robots, such as Spheros, Ozobots, Marty and several drones.
- Five high-quality 3-D printers, three of which are touchscreen and can be operated by even Kindergartners.
- "Science with the Principal" at every grade level
- An exceptional (and growing) school choir
- A library that was recently converted into a 21st-Century MakerSpace
- An after-school art club
- Mobile art carts



"We have seen an increase in interest and engagement, which I believe are leading indicators of academic growth and achievement."

— Dr. Creighton Helms, Principal

While COVID and virtual learning slowed down the implementation of many of these STEM initiatives, there's already plenty of positives coming from its addition to Gervais Elementary School.

Learn more about STEAM:

<https://www.eastmetrosteam.org/stem-school-transformation-planning>

<https://www.livescience.com/43296-what-is-stem-education.html>

<https://www.edtechupdate.com/stem/student-engagement/>

Graduating resilient, responsible students whose learning extends to the global community beyond Gervais.



Early Learning Center Serves Kids: Birth to Pre-K

Did you know the Gervais School District has programs that support children from birth all the way to graduation? It starts at the Early Learning Center, which is located off of First Street by the district office, in what used to be Sam Brown Academy.

The program was established years ago as a daycare for the children of alternative school students, but it has since expanded, adding the preschool component five years ago.

Last year, the district received grant money as part of the state's Preschool Promise, which provides high-quality and culturally-relevant early childhood programs to economically disadvantaged children. The program in Gervais allows for full-day preschool for 18 youngsters ages 3 and 4.

This service was provided even throughout the pandemic, so that the ELC was pretty much the only location of activity on the district campus.

"When COVID hit, we closed with the rest of the district (as the governor had ordered), but after three weeks we were up and running again as an emergency daycare," said program director Sylvia Garcia.

The ELC has held on to seven employees: three in the daycare, and four in the preschool.

"We have a pretty tight staff to student ratio," Garcia said. However, there once were more hands on deck when the high school sent students over as part of the early childhood education component to its career technical program. In fact, Garcia has hired a handful of those former students.

The ELC's curriculum aligns as closely as possible with Gervais Elementary School in an effort to provide a smooth transition for students from preschool to kindergarten. Part of that kinder readiness initiative also allows preschoolers to visit the kindergarten classrooms to see what it's like. The curriculum also aligns with state requirements that require one hour of building gross motor skills each day. Last year, Garcia applied for a Preschool Promise startup grant so they could build a covered play yard for the ELC, which would allow the students to play outside even during inclement weather.

"It's really exciting to see what the data shows, how early learning is very important," Garcia said. "We're working hard to make sure we have the staff with the best training possible and provide the best learning experience possible."



Message from the Superintendent

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more than 1.8 million student surveys in 39 states and 5 countries. To learn more, visit <https://youthtruthsurvey.org>.

By using an independent third party that is already an expert in designing surveys, analyzing survey results and comparing to national trends, we believed this would be a more reliable way of gleaning extensive, relevant information on how to move forward. We also believe that having a third party administer this anonymous and confidential survey allows participants to feel like they can be more honest in their answers.

Last year we had a total of 826 participants, and we're hoping to increase that number this year, particularly among parents. Please consider taking this important survey to help guide the future of your child's education and the overall success of Gervais School District.

With gratitude,

Dandy Stevens
Superintendent

Teacher Spotlight: Sterling Roberts

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University to get both his master's degrees in conducting and education, followed by full-time student teaching at Camas High School in Washington before receiving his teaching certificate.

Now in his fifth year of full-time teaching, Mr. Roberts is thrilled to be in Gervais, where the music program has been slowly rebuilding after budget cuts removed music from the curriculum for several years. But students are eager to participate, he said.

"The students are very flexible and cooperative and there's a sense of progress," he said.

Mr. Roberts, who generally listens to top 40 music, has learned a lot from his students already.

"It's been a lot of fun getting together the students' music tastes so we can do songs they like," he said. "I'm challenging myself to listen to other bands and music my students are telling me about. It's helping me communicate through music."

In addition to choir, Mr. Roberts has started teaching a middle school rhythms class which is basically drumming with buckets.

"The high school has a mantra of aiming for that 1% every day, and finding how we can interpret that to music is pretty special," he said. "I am able to use that to connect with students. Let's challenge ourselves to be 1% better whenever we can. In my class, I use this in a competitive breathing activity among both my high school classes. I remind them to reflect on their daily progress and encourage them to challenge their own growth to see what they may discover."