

*Gresham School District*

**GRESHAM COMMUNITY SCHOOLS**



*Newell E. Haffner  
Denise Guex  
James Dudek  
Benjamin Heninger  
Valerie Brooks*

*District Administrator/4K-5 Principal  
Director of Finance  
Director of Maintenance and Operations  
6-12 Principal  
Director of Special Education*



---

Dear Representative Gallagher,

I would like to provide you with an update from the Gresham School District as we address the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Students who are most vulnerable, including those with known disabilities, have been provided specialized instruction, therapies, accommodations and modifications in a variety of ways during the pandemic. Students with strong internet connections were provided teletherapy and virtual instruction frequently, with the help of a family member. The students without internet were contacted by phone. Some families have embraced this model and collaborated with the school to provide a rich learning environment. Other families did not have the time, reliable internet access, or a safe home learning environment that is required for students to learn and grow. In order for this to be effective, general education, special education and families needed to collaborate more than ever before. For some families, this initiative has worked well.

At Gresham School, we have provided over 212 breakfast and lunches daily to the members of our community. We deliver the lunches everyday from 9:00-11:00 am. With the meal delivery, we pick up and deliver homework to the students. This method has been effective in maintaining meaningful communications throughout the pandemic with most of our families.

We have managed to keep our aides and support staff members employed because they go on the bus routes to deliver the food and pick up the homework.

We contract out for our bus service. Currently, the bus drivers drive our school vans and deliver the lunches to our families. This also keeps the bus drivers employed. However, I am worried about what will happen after our normal school year ends on June 5. How am I going to deliver breakfast and lunches to our community? I will not have the aides to help me. Nor will I have the bus drivers. Ultimately, we may need to consider having the parents come to school to receive food for their families. This change will undoubtedly affect how many people are able to get lunches due to the fact that a considerable number of families do not have enough money to put gas in the car to come to school and pick up their meals.

One of the biggest challenges in the Gresham School District is internet accessibility. We have a number of families (39 students out of 273) who are in such a remote area that they cannot get reliable internet service where they live. Maybe, they could locate a satellite internet service provider, but they do not have the monetary resources to get it. We are a 52% poverty school district, as measured by our student participation in the free/reduced lunch program.

Our school district has a one-to-one technology initiative with everyone in grades 2-12 having access to a google chromebook. Initially, we were going to send home the chromebooks with our elementary students, but with so many families that did not have internet, they would have likely become little more than glorified paperweights.

Our small, rural school district can not afford to go out and purchase hot spots to improve connectivity. We have Wi-Fi access to our school internet in our parking lot, but we have not had many students or parents take advantage of this.

We have had to increase our copying budgets because all of our staff had to make paper copies to get lessons out to the students.

*Gresham School District*

**GRESHAM COMMUNITY SCHOOLS**



*Newell E. Haffner  
Denise Guex  
James Dudek  
Benjamin Heninger  
Valerie Brooks*

*District Administrator/4K-5 Principal  
Director of Finance  
Director of Maintenance and Operations  
6-12 Principal  
Director of Special Education*



---

We are worried about meeting the needs of our students with disabilities. Many of our students in special education receive a significant amount of help each day from their special education case managers in order to access our distance learning curriculum. We will not know until school is back in session how much remediation will be needed for our students with disabilities and struggling learners. We will not know if compensatory educational services, also called Covid Impacted Services, will be needed to help out our students.

If I had to say the one thing that has impaired our school district from doing a better job during this pandemic, it is the lack of wi-fi in our rural areas. When students are at school, we have the infrastructure to do wonderful things using the internet and our chromebooks. It was very hard for the community, staff, parents, and students to take a step back because a few families did not have the internet. They do not understand the equality part of an educational system.

For me, I have a family of seven. I have five kids; fifth grade, eighth grade, 10th grade, and two in college. In my home, I have two adult children trying to complete college courses from University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point at Wausau and Utah State. My eldest son is married and his wife was trying to complete her college courses from Utah State, also. I have my sophomore son, eighth grade daughter, and fifth grade daughter trying to get on the internet at the same time in my house. If I wanted to work from home, I couldn't. I have SIX people trying to access the internet during the school day. The internet lags due to not enough bandwidth. We have only one provider in my area of Gresham, so I can't even upgrade to better internet during the pandemic. This is a huge issue for families in our area.

The other aspect that is just starting to show up is mental health issues. We are starting to see the mental health effects of being confined to your home, loss of contact with friends, and loss of contact with adults.

Overall, we are feeding our students and trying to provide them with an education. Our teachers are making phone calls, video chats, video recordings, postcards, greeting cards, woodshop projects, art projects, and horticulture projects. The teachers miss the students and comment to me about this. The students have made tool boxes, grown plants, and designed viking ships. During this time, the school and community has done the best that it can to provide for all of our students.

As we move forward, I welcome your calls or emails so that I can explain our work and answer any questions you may have. I will also provide you with additional updates. Certainly, much work remains as we finish the school year, begin the summer school session, and prepare for the start of the new school year this fall.

Sincerely,

Newell E. Haffner  
[haffnen@gresham.k12.wi.us](mailto:haffnen@gresham.k12.wi.us)