



Pennsylvania Don Eichhorn Schools: Schools to Watch

Garnet Valley Middle School



School Statistics

<http://paschoolperformance.org>

Community: Rural
Enrollment: 1192
Grade Levels: 6, 7, 8
School Schedule: 8 period day including homeroom

Student Demographics

American Indian/Alaskan Native	0
Asian	13.26
Black or African American	2.27
Hispanic	2.68
Multi-Racial	.92
White	80.7

2015-16 Growth Data

Reading 62.5% Math 62.5% Science 59%

2015-16 School Performance Profile: 74.8

Designation: 2016-17

- Garnet Valley Middle School • Garnet Valley School District
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School Characteristics and Replicable Practices

Engaging. Collaborative. Rigorous. Meaningful. Garnet Valley Middle School is all of these, and so much more. Perhaps above all else, Garnet Valley Middle School is student-centered. Our students, and what is best for our students, is what drives us to adjust, improve, reflect, and grow. Because of our commitment to

the individual child, as well as our quest to guide each child toward academic excellence, we believe Garnet Valley Middle School (GVMS) is a School to Watch.

Academic Excellence

There is no question of Garnet Valley Middle School's commitment to academic excellence. We engage our students in learning that will promote personal growth as well as provide skills needed for college and career readiness.

GVMS challenges our learners while keeping their needs at the center of all we do. In recent years we have invested in bringing best practices into our building through the use of instructional coaches. As a district we have three technology coaches, all of whom are regularly visible in the middle school. The middle school also uses a literacy coach who works with teachers across grade levels and content areas to incorporate current instructional strategies into our classrooms.

Professional collaboration is an essential component of our middle school. Our core team of teachers meet several times per week, and grade level partners meet one to two times per week to discuss curriculum, assessment, instruction and cross-team collaborations, closely examining our day to day practices, specific instructional practices, and grade level data trends.

Keeping in mind the various learning styles and needs of individual students, our teachers pride themselves on incorporating a variety of instructional practices. Since all learners are diverse in their needs, our teachers vary their instruction to include auditory, visual and kinesthetic activities. Furthermore, since all students require different levels of repetition and guided practice, our teachers diversify the model of engagement through the gradual release of responsibility. Using a mixture of guided practice, whole and small group instruction, cooperative groupings, partner activities and independent practice, teachers ensure students are mastering course material. Our teachers also incorporate assessments that not only meet the needs of the students and the grade level expectations of the state, but also create authentic learning experiences for our students.

At GVMS, teachers work to help students achieve academic success during regular school hours, that is a given, but they also provide structure and support prior to school, during lunch, during study hall and after school. By going the extra mile, our teachers support academic achievement and model the importance of learning to our students and families.

Developmental Responsiveness

By employing the team model, the teachers at GVMS are able to ensure that all students are engaged in rigorous learning across the curriculum. Our teams meet daily to discuss learning needs, social emotional concerns, scheduling changes, building and district initiatives, curriculum, and instructional practices.

Department teams assigned to each grade level also meet regularly to align assessment and instruction.

Garnet Valley implements a wide variety of programs to ensure we continue to teach to the whole child and provide optimal learning conditions for all. Our transition program ensures our incoming students are well acclimated and engaged prior to entering sixth grade. In the spring of fifth grade, all students take a tour of the middle school and have the opportunity to meet the guidance staff and administrators. Students with special learning needs are provided additional opportunities to visit the building and become accustomed to the staff and routines. Throughout the spring months a team of administrators and teachers representing the elementary level and middle school collaborate to discuss programming and needs to ensure a smooth transition for our students. Subsequent meetings and small group tours are also common practice for students with special circumstances. All of our transitional procedures culminate in our transition camp.

Transition camp is a two day process and an excellent opportunity for our incoming sixth graders to learn more about the building, procedures, locker-experiences and daily schedule. Guided tours from current students and staff are also a highlight of the experience. Approximately 85-90% of our incoming sixth grade students attend camp and a significant number of teachers attend and support the initiative.

GVMS is about producing active and curious learners, but we are also about creating socially aware citizens. Each year, our students are tasked to consider their immediate environment as well as the world

around them. Our teachers actively engage in raising awareness and support for various causes and encourage our students to do the same. At any point in the year, you will hear of an activity promoting awareness of some type, from Soles4Souls to our Warm Items Drive from collecting used eyeglasses, to collecting spare change for clean water in developing nations. We support larger organizations by hosting our annual Hoops for Heart tournament, Kids Fight Cancer event, and the Canned Food Drive/CANstruction event. This past year, our seventh grade social studies teamed with our Technology Coach to support TEAL, an organization whose mission is to help teach sugarcane workers in the Dominican Republic conversational English via a weekly Skype call. Each week, two students from each team “meet” with students in the Dominican Republic for approximately twenty minutes. Finally, our eighth grade Language Arts department includes a Social Causes project as part of their unit on argumentation. Students present their causes and then the grade decides which cause to pursue in fundraising efforts. While only one cause receives the funds, student awareness is raised in many domains.

Recognizing that education is more than just academics, we host many services that support the social emotional needs of our learners; these services include access to a social worker, a behavior specialist, a school nurse, a school psychologist, our guidance department, and our Student Assistance Program. Likewise, social emotional learning is an integral component of our professional learning sessions.

Every year our guidance department hosts Career Day, highlighting over 50 different careers and professionals. By choosing to learn about professions that interest them, students learn from professionals with real life connections. Our guidance department also facilitates Peer Buddies, a program that matches small groups of middle school students with peer mentors from the high school. Finally, guidance hosts several social groups and lunch groups for students with similar needs.

One of our major points of pride is the extensive list of extracurricular activities offered at the middle school. Approximately 80% of our overall population participates in some type of extracurricular activity. Taking into consideration the ever-growing and changing needs of our students, we attempt to offer programs

to engage every student. Besides the usual middle school clubs we offer some unique choices such as Murals Club, Board Games Club, Robotics, Horticulture Club, and several intramural sports. Our music program is home to more than 30% of our students when considering band, chorus and orchestra. Students perform in school concerts, local events and Band, Chorus, and String Fests.

Social Equity

Each student's needs are considered and valued in the learning processes and daily structure of our middle school. As a district, Garnet Valley embraces academic diversity and inclusive practices; GVMS is no exception to this. Our support teachers work closely with all teachers to ensure both academic and social success for our students. We provide a wide array of supportive services such as learning support, emotional support, autistic support, gifted support, life skills, speech and language support, behavior support, reading support, math support, english as a second language services, guidance support, and social services. All of these supports and services work with the academic and special area teams to ensure our students have the optimal learning experiences in the least restrictive environment and help them strive to reach their fullest potential.

Our special education services are second to none and currently service close to 20% of our overall middle school population, most of which are fully included in our regular programming. Our inclusion model utilizes co-teaching supports, differentiated instruction, differentiated assessment, and additional outside support structures for those who require it. Our resource room classes mirror the expectations of the typical content course whenever possible. At GVMS support is available for all levels of learners. Our Academically Talented Program offers extension and enrichment activities for our gifted population, while our multi-sensory programs provide extended support and reteaching for students performing significantly below grade level in Language Arts and/or Math.

Students who do not qualify for special education but may require extra practice, have an opportunity to work with one of our specialists. We offer both Reading and Math Techniques to our learners performing just

below grade level expectations. These courses are offered to supplement the general courses of study, and the curriculum mirrors the skills students are expected to acquire in their grade level.

Four years ago, the Life Skills and Autistic Support teachers from GVMS created the Spring Invitational. This annual event includes 9 schools from Delaware County and this past year included approximately 250 students. Students participate in field events and receive medals and shirts at the conclusion...a mini Olympics in its own right. The students in these programs also run the school store, hold specific jobs around the building and participate in Community Based Instruction.

To reach all students our English Language Arts department adopted a Reading Workshop model for independent reading. This research-based practice is integrated building-wide and offers an opportunity for our teachers to meet our students where they are. Workshop offers student choice, an opportunity to embed skills, and a natural way to differentiate for students; conferencing about reading allows teachers to learn individual student's strengths and needs and provides additional insight into students' personalities and interests.

Garnet Valley Middle School actively seeks opportunities for its members to engage in professional learning opportunities. Besides incorporating whole staff book studies on such titles as *Best Practice*, *Mindset*, and *What Great Teachers Do Differently*, the middle school sends its teachers to workshops that will extend their learning and provide them opportunities to bring it back to other staff members. In the last two years, members of our staff attended workshops and/or learning opportunities at local schools, Teachers College, Penn Literacy Network, STEM Education at University of PA, PA Educational Technology Expo and Conference, and Delaware County Intermediate Unit, among other individual one day conferences. To further demonstrate our commitment to growth, for the past two years, we have sent a team of more than ten teachers to the PA Association for Middle Level Education state conference to remain current in our practices for middle level learners. This year, two groups from our building facilitated informational sessions on *Reading Workshop* and *Content Area Literacy*. Our professional development "Menu Days" allow our teachers to pursue their passions. Each "Menu Day" offers a choice of more than 50 professional learning opportunities, often

facilitated by area experts, for district staff members to attend and immediately implement new strategies into their classrooms.

Organizational Structures and Processes

The age of technology has enhanced our ability to keep our families informed. Ongoing communication with our families takes the form of weekly e-alerts, web pages, access to grades online, learning management systems, Twitter, and Good News postcards. Parents are welcome to schedule team conferences at any time, and are encouraged to attend conferences in both the fall and spring.

Within the first two weeks of school, GVMS hosts a Back to School Night where parents gain a first hand understanding of expectations for their student in the upcoming school year. During our conference windows, our teachers extend their hours to accommodate the needs of working parents. To bring in the community and to highlight student accomplishments, GVMS hosts Family Literacy Night. The evening includes hands-on activities from many disciplines, author visits, and a gallery display of student work from all grade levels and subject areas.

To maintain and enhance 21st Century skills 70% of our classrooms are equipped with either an iPad or Chromebook cart. All classrooms contain a Smartboard and projector or an Apple TV and 100% of our teachers have a MacBook. Our district's summer Technology Boot Camp for staff ensures that teachers receive proper training in implementing these tools. Subsequent trainings are held over the course of the year for continued professional development in technology.

This summer our library is receiving a makeover. Our space will be updated and maximized by including an Innovation Lab complete with collaboration tables, large and small group work spaces, and a Maker Space. Access to these areas will help keep our programs on the cutting edge by including more STEAM opportunities. These areas will cultivate collaboration among staff and students and promote creativity, exploration, and shared inquiry.

Garnet Valley is not just a middle school, it is a community. Our staff is personally invested in our students and their success. We engage in reflective practices, constantly assessing our ability to help students achieve success. We use Curriculum Diagnostic Tools (CDT) assessment data, PVAAS Projections, PSSA data, and classroom based assessments to adjust and inform instruction. This data has also been used to hand schedule students as they proceed to the next grade. Finally, we have laid groundwork for common assessments in several departments in order to continue to move our building forward.