

GATOR GAZETTE



Giffen Memorial Elementary School Newsletter

Winter 2022

A note from Principal Brown ...

Hello Giffen Families. Is it newsletter time again? Where did the time go? February – SAY WHAT?? Time flies when you are having fun. Let me begin by saying thank you, thank you, thank you. Thank you for entrusting your children to us and believing in us to provide the safest environment possible for your children to learn and grow. I know this time last year we all thought COVID would be a thing from the past but with all of our

diligence and hard work, I am hoping that there is light just beyond the horizon. As Gators, let's continue to do what we do best – PERSEVERE!

Our academic focus this year continues to be to use student data to make instructional and social-emotional decisions for your children as individuals and to make sure that we are implementing strong standards-based instruction for ALL students. Report cards are



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SAVE THE DATES!

FEBRUARY

- 18 College Friday
- 21-25 No school, Winter Recess

MARCH

- 5 Conversations with the Coordinators, 12:30 p.m.
- 9 PTA meeting, 5 p.m.
- 10 Families Learning Together, 5 p.m.
- 11 No school for students, conference day
- 24 Family Art Night, 5 p.m.
- 25 College Friday
- 29-30 NYS English language arts test

APRIL

- 2 Conversations with the Coordinators, 12:30 p.m.
- 13 PTA meeting, 5 p.m.
- 14 Families Learning Together, 5 p.m.
- 26-27 NYS math test
- 29 College Friday

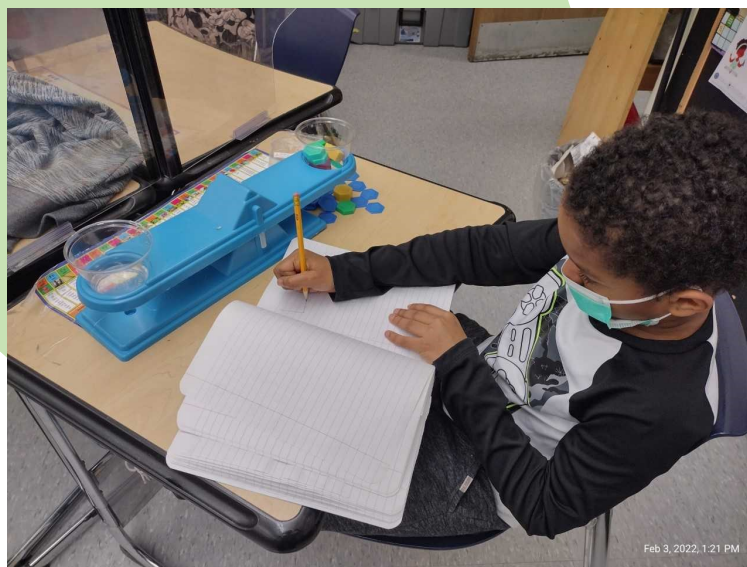
BALANCING ACT

In third grade science, we have moved into measurement with two-pan balances (scales) and are learning about mixtures and solutions!

Students are learning that the vocabulary word **balance** can be used in many ways! In our forces and motion study, balanced means the wheels need to be the same on an axle so a cart can go straight.

When the forces pushing on either side of a heavy box are **balanced**, the box will not move. When our scales are **balanced**, we can find the mass of an object. We even realized that to **balance** a math equation in math, both sides have to be equal!

Here's a picture of one of us exploring with our **balances** to determine the mass of some mixtures!



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Attendance matters

Students benefit in many ways from being in school: in their academic and social-emotional growth, and in the supportive relationships they build with peers, teachers and staff members.

Attendance matters in a student's success starting as early as kindergarten. Missing even two days every month causes students to fall behind. By sixth grade, chronic absence is a leading predictor that a student will drop out of high school. By ninth grade, regular attendance is a better predictor of graduation than eighth-grade test scores.

Students are expected to be in school every day unless they are sick, have a medical appointment or have a religious reason. If your student is absent, you must provide a written excuse for every absence or late arrival. The excuse must be signed and dated and reasons for the absence or lateness.

Being on time for school is part of having good attendance! Missing 5-10 minutes of class might not seem like much, but it adds up. Every time your child comes in late, they start the day playing catch-up. Help your child be successful and get them to school on time. Giffen is committed to working with you to help your student have great attendance!

FROM ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL FLAX-LEIGHT

The greatest gift we share with the world is our children. They carry on our values and our love. In the end, they will be our legacy. They will carry our memory and through it we will be remembered.

A school building is not a school. When I arrive in the morning and wait for the darkness to lift, the halls are silent. There are no excited voices, no laughter, no smiles. Although the sun rises before 7, our halls are not filled with light until the first students arrive.

I was raised by two wonderful grandparents who never finished school but knew the importance of getting me to the bus stop every day. They couldn't always help me with my homework, but they always connected me with the resources available at school. My grandfather was a disabled veteran, but he helped me find coaches who could teach me how to run and throw a football. They took good care of me and I knew it was my responsibility to learn. School was

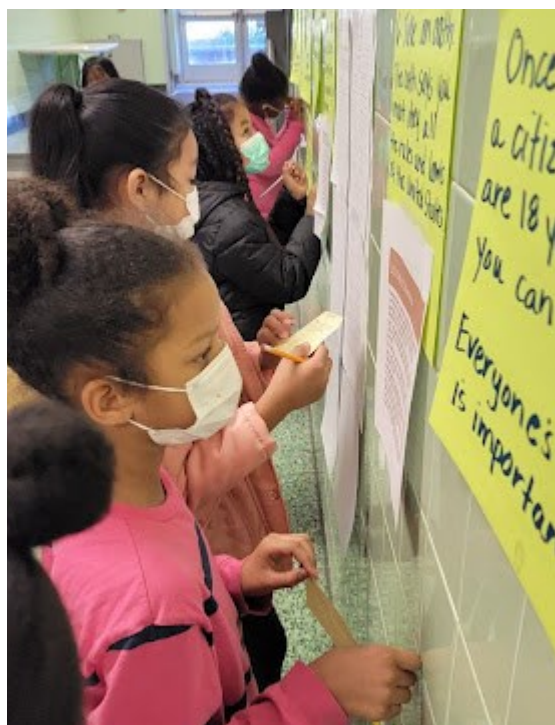
my job. Even now, school is my job (and my passion) 30 years later.

I see people that remind me of my grandparents every day at Giffen.

Mothers and fathers dropping off their sons and daughters at the primary door. In their eyes, I see all the hopes and dreams. I see grandparents raising a second generation. Step, adopted and foster parents who prove that love and devotion has nothing to do with biology. That love in the heart pumps as strongly as blood. Thank you for the gift you give with the world. Please continue doing everything in your power to get our students here. It all starts with attendance. Each day is filled with unique lessons and experiences. Students at Giffen grow every single day. You are building a dream brick by brick, one school day at a time. Please don't hesitate to reach out if we can assist you.



Third graders explore immigration experience



Third grade readers and writers recently explored why people immigrate to new places. Students reread complex texts, identifying the main idea and supporting details.

Throughout our learning we learned how to use topic sentences to determine the main idea. Students applied their understanding of an immigrant's naturalization process during a gallery walk.

Students also experienced the naturalization process through the eyes of an immigrant. They were able to establish background knowledge and apply their own experiences to their new learning.

TELL US YOUR THOUGHTS: TWO IMPORTANT SURVEYS

Family Engagement Survey

The relationship between your family and our school is central to your student's success, and your feedback is important for our school improvement efforts. That's why we encourage you to take this survey.

Here's how to access the survey for our school online:

- Visit albanyschools.org/FamilySurvey OR
- Use the QR code on the right from your smart phone

The password to log in to our school's survey is **Giffen2022**

Please note this password is case sensitive. The survey will be **open through March 1**.

It's easy to complete online – just follow one of the two links and enter the password. There are 25 questions that are rated on a five-part scale. There also are three open questions for you to offer your comments.

All survey responses are anonymous. We ask that there be one survey per household (if you have students in more than one school, then one survey per household for each of your children's schools; you will receive a similar letter from those schools with the password to log in to that survey).



Digital Equity Survey

COVID-19 has highlighted how important technology is to student learning. Ensuring students have equal access to technology and the training needed to navigate digital tools is called "digital equity."

To better serve students, families, and educators, the New York State Education Department is conducting a Digital Equity Survey. The purpose of this survey is to understand and promote educational equity, including digital equity for all students in New York State. The data collected from this survey also will help us understand and support our students and families more effectively.

Please use the QR code on the right to take the survey, and sign in with your child's student login information.



Principal's message *(continued from page 1)*

coming home, and I encourage you to please review them. We also just concluded our English Language Arts and Math benchmark and NWEA assessments. As a school that is still identified by the state as needing improvement, it is these very assessments that help us make instructional shifts for student growth. While assessments may seem like a scary word to some, it isn't here at Giffen. We work hard to build those lifelong needed skills into instruction so that students are goal oriented and confident in what they know and are ready to show it! After reviewing your child's report card, I encourage you to reach out to your child's teacher. Communication with your child's teacher is of the utmost importance so that we may work together to meet their needs. Feel free to use the Remind App to touch base with your child's teacher, or you can always give us a call at (518) 475-6650.

Also, in an effort to continue to activate our student voices around social justice, uplift students as individuals, teach about the social ills around us and teach students how they can make a difference, we continue engaging in our One School, One Book Project: "We Rise, We Resist, We Raise our Voices." Please ask your child about the book and what discussions they have had or projects in school they have done around it. In the upcoming weeks, the entire building will be engaged in a door-decorating contest around the texts.

And as always, please be sure to check student backpacks and our social media outlets/apps to stay informed. I look forward to seeing you all at an upcoming event (even if it is virtual). Stay warm. Stay safe. Heads and masks up! Love you all, Mrs. Brown.

PHONE-FREE GATORS

Giffen fourth and fifth graders recently began using their “Yondr” pouches – simple, lockable devices that allow students to store their phones during the school day.

When they arrive at school, students lock their phone in their personally assigned Yondr pouch. They keep the locked pouch with them throughout the school day, and at the end of the day, homeroom teachers unlock the pouches.

We believe that cell phones can be very useful. We have also found that learning and social behavior improve drastically when students are fully engaged with their teachers and classmates and not distracted by their phones

We are proud of our students for being responsible for locking their cell phones each morning. We also appreciate the parents and staff for their support with making the Yondr transition a success. Our goal is to make Giffen a phone-free space that improves teaching and learning!



Classroom spotlight

Prekindergarten: Our theme-based learning allows us to include all areas of learning. We started winter off with learning about celebrations from around the world including Kwanzaa, Chanukah, Diwali and Christmas. The children enjoyed learning about how different cultures from around the world celebrate.

We began 2022 with our unit on the solar system, learning about the sun, moon, stars and planets. Students engaged in many hands-on activities to learn more about our galaxy.

We are now focusing on rhyming. Students have learned that rhyming words sound the same at the end. The children have also been exposed to many nursery rhymes that allow them to practice and identify the words that rhyme.

Kindergarten: Our students have been hard at work studying hibernation and migration of animals in the winter. We have also been working on observing trees in the winter and their physical changes.

Kendore Learning, an education program we are using, has been a huge success in helping students learn letter names and sounds. We are currently learning our vowels in vowel valley. In math, we are working on subtraction skills. We are ready for first grade!

We're learning to make beautiful music

After a few months of exploration, third and fourth grade students have begun their first lessons on band and orchestra instruments. Students spent the first few months of school learning how each instrument makes sound and how to identify each instrument. They also learned about famous recordings and musicians and even got to touch and see the instruments up close and personal! After hearing all about the string, woodwind, brass and percussion families, students made an informed decision about what instrument they wanted to play. You may see more students in the halls of Giffen with instrument cases. If your child is still interested in being a part of the instrumental music program but has not yet joined, please talk to one of our music staff members for more information. We can't wait to hear the beautiful music these students will make in the coming years!