

# The Bears' Beacon

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## Bridges Program: Beginning an Open Dialogue on School Climate By Dwaritha Ramesh

Here at GMHS, we seek to grow as a tightly-knit community, encouraging acceptance, compassion, community involvement, and effective collaboration with as much gusto as academic excellence. As such, one of our most important goals is to make GMHS a place where everyone can feel safe, accepted, and able to learn to the best of their ability. The National Conference for Community Justice's Bridges program, introduced to our school this year, sought to inspire students to do just that.

Faculty nominated students and two teachers (Mr. Stanwood and Ms. Strain) participated in the NCCJ Bridges program, a full two-day school climate and anti-prejudice workshop conducted on December 11th and 12th by two representatives from the NCCJ. Bridges exposed students to a variety of different activities to allow them to begin an introspective search to understand the root of prejudice in society, the school, and within themselves.

Students held unrestrained, insightful discussions with their peers at the Bridges program as they reflected on hands-on activities and media presentations to connect new understandings about the ubiquity of prejudice and discrimination in our culture with their own lives and experiences. Although many were initially surprised by the openness of the discussion at the beginning of the program, the participants gradually became more comfortable speaking about their perspective on sensitive social issues. This ignited passionate discussion among participants with regards to opinions on the pervasiveness of racism, sexism, classism, ableism, and religious discrimination in our school.

Mr. Stanwood, who was actively involved in the Bridges training, spoke of the level of student involvement in the program with gusto: "...we were looking for students who wanted to take some reasonable action steps to make an im-

pact here at GMHS rather than just passively making abstract statements or complaining about how awful things are... I thought there was a lot of self-discovery happening over the two day workshop, and a lot of students learning to develop a sense of empathy... It was a proud teacher moment."

"...I would say that the [Bridges] experience was motivational and that it unified the people included," Bennett Rodriguez, a sophomore involved in the program, commented. "Going through Bridges with my peers was a very fun two days and something I wish the whole school could have been a part of."

Inspired by the open discussion sparked by the Bridges program, *The Bears' Beacon* created an anonymous, handwritten poll of a small sampling of the student body (58 students) to assess the school's opinions on potential discrimination issues brought up by Bridges participants over the two day program. Student comments were all strikingly similar to the few notable quotes included here alongside the survey results. *The Beacon* believes that it is necessary to create a whole school environment in which students are comfortable discussing discrimination issues, just as the Bridges program provided an environment for the participating students to speak out about their personal experiences and opinions. We thus invite you to respond to us with any comments, questions, or personal stories that you believe will move our school-wide climate discussion along. Granby, as a small rural town, can very often seem to us like a bubble, closed off from the rest of the world and its problems. However, this makes it easy for deep-rooted prejudice to escape unnoticed and subtly affect the overall climate of our society. Open discussion of discrimination issues might allow us to find ways to make our school and town a better place -- together.

**The #MeToo Movement**  
**By Sammi Gove**



“#MeToo” A brave, deep-rooted statement and movement that began as a backlash to Trump’s election and by the sexual harassment allegations that film-producer Harvey Weinstein and Trump himself have received in the past year. Almost 18 million people have reported sexual assault since 1998, while many victims have held their

**YES Club: The Home of Future Educators**  
**By Jalyn Brown and Mackenzie Dowd**

Do you have an interest in teaching? Does the field of education seem like the best option for your future? If so, join the YES club. The YES club, also known as the “Young Educators of Society Club,” is ran by Mrs. Iapichino and meets the first Wednesday of every month.

As a YES club member you will experience child care, and learn about the vast world of education. Last year, the YES club took a trip to Small World Daycare, to help young kids build gingerbread houses. From

silence.

The movement was founded by Tarana Burke, who has been an activist for victims of sexual violence since 2006 when she first started using the phrase #MeToo to display “empowerment through empathy” among victims of abuse. She was featured in the Time Magazine’s People of the Year Issue as a “silence breaker” in global dialogue.

Allegations directed towards Trump and Weinstein have opened the door for conversation. It allowed the public to prove that there is, in fact, a problem. Actress Alyssa Milano was one of the first voices to encourage women to use #MeToo on Twitter. She

wanted to demonstrate to the world the widespread problem that sexual abuse is and will continue to be if we do not stop it.

The movement has also brought to light how people of all races, backgrounds, genders, and sexualities can experience these problems. It opened the door for us to discuss the importance of consent and the rules that it should be coupled with. Only thirteen of the states in the U.S. require sexual education to be medically accurate, which makes it hard to give students enough accurate information about sex and sexual consent to be able make healthy decisions.

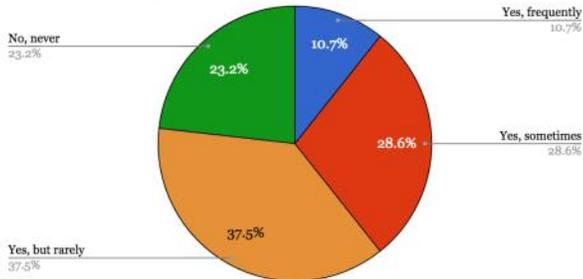
*“Almost 18 million people have reported sexual assault since 1998, while many have held their silence.”*

this trip, YES club members were able to experience what it is like to work with real young children in a daycare environment. Along with this, we were able to hear a capstone project about what it is like to work with young children from a senior who worked at the YMCA in the daycare center. The YES Club, will help you develop a leadership mentality, and will prepare you for your future career in teaching. So, are you ready to take the first step in achieving your goals? If so, join the YES Club, and speak to Mrs. Iapichino for more details.

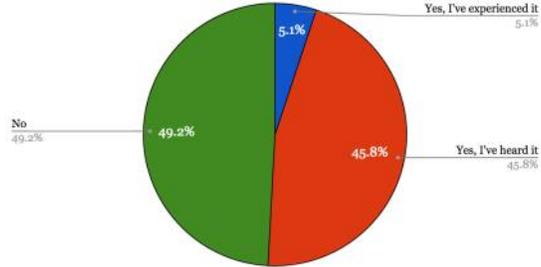
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## Bridges Student Poll Data

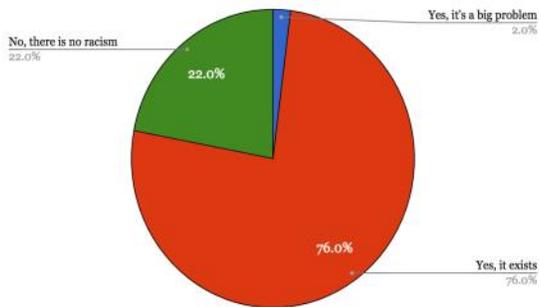
Have you ever used or heard discriminatory words (racially or sexually discriminatory or classist/ableist language) being used in casual conversation with your friends?



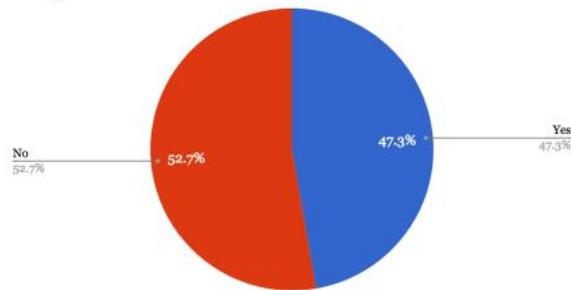
Have you ever heard uninvited sexual comments being made in school?



Do you think racism is an issue in this school?



In your opinion, does discrimination affect school climate and the ability of some students to learn and perform well here at GMHS?



## Student Quotes

**Have you ever used or heard discriminatory words (racially or sexually discriminatory or classist/ableist language) being used in casual conversation with your friends?**

- “Many people see it as a joke but it offends me seeing as I know people with autism and when people say ‘that’s autistic,’ it’s offensive.”
- “...not towards anyone, but behind people’s backs.”
- “I hear it all the time when my friends joke around with each other.”

**Have you every heard uninvited sexual comments being made in school?**

- “A sub we had in class one day used sexist language.”
- “I hear it VERY often.”
- “I have heard stories of guys making sexual comments about my friends.”
- “Not frequently but I have heard it and seen it.”

**Do you think racism is an issue in this school?**

- “When the sign [outside the school] was defaced last year [with a racial slur].”
- “I definitely think some changes could be made.”
- “There’s a small group of intolerant students.”

**In your opinion, does discrimination affect school climate and the ability of some students to learn and perform well here at GMHS?**

- “For sure! People act differently around certain groups of people and this affects their learning.”
- “A lot of kids don’t feel comfortable in the school environment and don’t want to learn.”
- “I think many people in our school don’t let things like race and religion choose who they interact with.”

## Charles Okwandu: The Life of the Man in the Halls By Mike Mavredakis



Charles Okwandu, former Men's NCAA Basketball champion from UConn, is the current Freshman Basketball coach at Granby Memorial High School, as well as GMHS's hall monitor. He spends his day traversing the halls, smiling, high-fiving students, and keeping everyone in a good mood. However, there is one responsibility that is much more serious: escorting misbehaving students to the office. This aspect of his job is not Mr. Okwandu's favorite because it paints him as the "bad guy", which could not be further from the truth. He is a caring individual who is always thinking about others.

Every morning, Mr. Okwandu stands in the doorway in front of the school and high-fives eve-

ry student entering the building. He smiles at them and tells them to have a wonderful day, no matter who they are. When asked about this small gesture Mr. Okwandu said that bringing a little joy to a student's day brings him great joy, too..

When asked to comment on this daily greeting, Senior Lexi Cyr stated, "Every morning when I walk in, he's right there to give me a high five. It's a nice way to start the morning, seeing him so positive and ready to greet everyone."

As a child growing up in Nigeria, there was a well in Mr. Okwandu's village where people from outside their village would come fetch water, which angered his neighbors. Due to his desire to help others, Mr. Okwandu used to assist these outsiders in need draw water from the well, when the neighbors weren't

looking. Risking trouble to help others is a prime example of the quality of Mr. Okwandu's character.

Fast forward back to today and Mr. Okwandu has a much bigger focus in his life: his daughter, the light of his life. "I have always wanted to have a kid. I want to have ten kids. I love having a little clone of me. I want a son, who's going to be seven feet like me and play basketball. He's going to be a problem." Clearly family is more important to him than anything else.

Mr. Okwandu treats those around him like family and is always quick to offer a smile sure to brighten anyone's day.

## Teacher Spotlight by Serena Morris

### Mr. Roes

**Serena:** “How do you like to teach your classes?”

**Mr. Roes:** “I try to do as much hands-on as possible. The GMHS Science department has a lot of great lab space and equipment and we have a philosophy that involves hands-on learning. I'm also big on collaboration like being able to turn to a partner and explain something. All of our lessons start out with a hook and bell ringer, and end with an exit slip so we can show what we have learned.”

**Serena:** “Have you worked at previous schools before coming to Granby?”

**Mr. Roes:** “I worked at the Masters School over in Simsbury for 5 years. That's what brought me to Connecticut.”



If you have Mr. Roes as a teacher here are some things you should expect to encounter in his class: he loves to laugh at his own jokes. He also despises electric pencil sharpeners, so don't expect to find one in his room. In class he shows great enthusiasm for hands-on learning, which he uses to connect with his students.

### Mr. Williamson



**Serena:** “Have you worked at previous schools before coming to Granby?”

**Mr. Williamson:** “I worked at Rocky Hill High School as a seventh grade science teacher.

**Serena:** “Describe yourself in 3 words.”

**Mr. Williamson:** “I am funny or I try to be anyway, sometimes students don't agree with that. I am also fairly laid-back, and I am active; I am a distance runner.”

My interview with Mr. Williamson showed me that he likes to have a relaxed attitude when teaching. And don't make him angry because although he may not look speedy, he runs daily with his son and may surprise you with his speed.

### Mrs. Ransom

**Serena:** “What is your favorite quote?”

**Mrs. Ransom:** “There is a quote from an Italian painter from the Renaissance who said ‘The best way to get started on an art project is with hard work, perseverance and integrity.’ I always think that that is the best way to start an artwork, by having a good attitude and a strong work ethic.”

**Me:** “What is one thing on your bucket list?”

**Mrs. Ransom:** “I would like to build an animal shelter. I have a farm and so I would like to someday turn my farm into a place where horses, other farm animals, dogs, and cats can find a home.”

Before coming to Granby to work as a Drawing and Painting and 2D design instructor, Mrs. Ransom worked at a CREC school in Hartford and at Kelly Lane. But if you're meeting her for the first time, I can tell you some things to expect from her in class. When teaching, she prefers to include history along with art projects to help students understand the culture of art that surrounds them.



## From the Drawing Board to the Playing Field: FIRST Robotics at GMHS

By Kate Hosack

On January 6th, 30 GMHS students met for the beginning of an intense and fulfilling 6-week process. In this short amount of time, the Granby GRUNTS Robotics Team will design, build, and program a robot from the ground up

The Granby GRUNTS, now an official FIRST veteran, began in 2009 as Granby Robotics Under No Technical Supervision (hence, the GRUNTS.) In 2015, they won CT State and Pioneer Valley Championships, placed 11th in the New England District Championships, and finished in the top 1% at World Championships in St. Louis, MO.

The robotics program that the GRUNTS operate under is known as FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology). FIRST was founded in 1989 by Dean Kamen (inventor of the Segway) and Woodie Flowers (MIT professor). Disappointed by the number of young students, especially

women and minorities, who were interested in science careers, they decided to create what would become one of the most incredible high school experiences ever. The first FIRST competition season was in the year 1992. Twenty-eight

teams met in a high school gymnasium in New Hampshire. Their task: sort through corn.

The program has grown quite spectacularly over the years, now boasting nearly 7,000 registered teams across 24 countries. Last year, 75,000 students and 19,000 mentors participated in FIRST Steamworks, a fast paced, high stakes game that demands strategy, skill, and cooperation from all involved, as



with all FIRST games. This year is no exception. At 10:30 EST, the 2018 season's game was unveiled for the first time in a stream on Twitch. The feeling in the room was electric, as teammates speculated about what the next six weeks would hold. The countdown on the screen reached 0 —the 2018 robotics build season officially began! On screen, the ponytail wearing Woodie Flowers reminded FIRST students about the importance of gracious professionalism, while Dean Kamen impressed upon them the importance of education and the impact of FIRST robotics. Finally, the game animation was released.

After months of retro gaming-themed teasers and leaks, FIRST Powerup was finally revealed. Alliances of three randomly selected teams are pitted against other alliances in a series of qualification matches. Matches are 2 minutes and 30 seconds long. Within the first 15 seconds, the robot must operate autonomously, meaning all its actions are preprogrammed and are executed with no active driver input. After the autonomous period, human drivers take over and guide the robot through certain tasks to earn points. The main function of this year's robot is to deliver 'Power Cubes' (milk crates covered in branded fabric) to three areas on the 27 ft x 54 ft field: the Scale, the Switches (mini scales), or the Vault. Power Cubes on the Scale and Switches tip the balance in favor of the alliance who placed them. The longer the balance is tipped in the alliance's favor, the more points they earn. Cubes are delivered to the Vault via robot-human interaction, where they can be traded in for 'power-ups' that help the teams along.



## From the Drawing Board to the Playing Field: FIRST Robotics at GMHS (cont'd)

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All this leads us to the heart-stopping Endgame. For the third year in a row, the main goal in the last 30 seconds of the game is to elevate your robot. In FIRST Powerup, a 13 inch long metal bar is attached to the Scale seven feet above the ground. Robots must grapple the bar and raise themselves at least a foot off the carpet. Last year, in FIRST Steamworks, robots had to climb approximately 4 feet up a rope, but any climbing element presents the risk for severe damage to a team's robot.

Minutes after the broadcast concluded, the Granby GRUNTS were off to the drawing board, literally. All team members in attendance retreated to the Commons to pour over the hefty rule book, determine strategy, and begin designing their robot, soon to become one of their most precious labors of love. The GRUNTS brainstormed from 9 am to 5 pm. It's tiring work, trying to accelerate the design process and be as perfect as possible. They returned the next day and began the process all over again.

On January 7th, 30 members of GMHS's own Granby GRUNTS walked out of the school, exhausted, but ecstatic, with smiles on their faces, and designs swimming around in their heads. In true FIRST spirit, everyone is looking forward to the next six weeks: the hardest fun they'll ever have.

If you'd like to learn more about the FIRST robotics program, you can visit [www.firstinspires.org](http://www.firstinspires.org). You can follow the Granby GRUNTS throughout their season at [www.granbygrunts.com](http://www.granbygrunts.com), and on Instagram and Twitter @team3146.

## Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the Bears' Beacon's first publication of the year! This will be the first of four issues and it is available in both print in the commons and online. I am very excited for our group of collaborators this year and I hope you enjoy their work! They have all done a wonderful job so far and they can only get better as the year goes on. I have worked closely with our advisors and our assistant editor Dwaritha.

If you wish to contribute to our paper, feel free to contact me or submit work through our email. We meet every Tuesday after school in room, 2118.

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