

Dear GHS Parents & Guardians,

Before my arrival in 2008 and since, GHS administration, dance chaperones, some students, and some parents have struggled with the modern dance culture. It is by no means the students' fault, but the dancing they have witnessed on MTV/VHS/movies involves primarily only sexually suggestive grinding. Grinding basically involves a girl having her back and buttocks pushed up/pulled up against the boy's groin with the boy's hands on her hips and other places. There is a spectrum of this dancing that includes some space between the partners to absolutely no space and even the girl bending over in front of the boy.

The challenges of this dance culture (nationwide, not just at GHS) include the following:

- 1) This is very difficult to monitor/control with a giant mass of students, low lighting, and very provocative music (just listen to 97.9 or 93.1 on the radio). GHS administrators do walk through this mass of people and chaperones are present, but it is still very difficult to monitor/control, even with increasing the lighting and asking DJs to be careful with music choices.
- 2) Very few GHS staff members have been willing to serve as chaperones because of the awkward position this places them in, of being present for this dancing and having to break it up.
- 3) School administrators are placed in the situation of being bouncers. This results in an antagonistic relationship between administrators and students.
- 4) What regularly happens at dances in terms of student contact would never be condoned during the school day.
- 5) Younger students have complained about being forced/manipulated/encouraged to participate in grinding.
- 6) Parents have complained about how their children have been harassed at dances and/or exposed to conduct that they believe should not occur at school.

Attempts to improve the situation:

In 2013-14, GHS administration decided the dance culture needed to be addressed/improved or we could no longer hold dances for the above reasons. School Council, comprised of 10 staff members and 10 students, took on the challenge of coming up with some new dance procedures (more lighting, a change in where the DJ sets up in the gym, advising the DJ on mixing up the music, having more chaperones, making it clear to students that grinding was not allowed, having GHS administrators pause the dance to warn students, etc). Student Council was advised of these recommended changes, as several members of Student Council also served on School Council.

Dances during 2013-14, despite the sincere efforts of the GHS administrators and chaperones, continued to be plagued by the culture of grinding.

2014 – 15 School Year

The Homecoming Dance was held on 9/20/14. The recommendations made by School Council were implemented. During the dance, it was announced as a reminder that grinding was not allowed. This led to a walk-out of two-thirds of the students in attendance. The following week, GHS was disrupted by an uprising of sorts by the seniors and juniors, demanding that grinding should be allowed. In fact, the story of the walk-out was utilized by radio station 97.9 to drive up their ratings all week (one of 97.9's DJs had been the DJ at the dance). Some GHS students were invited on air to speak about the situation. This was a difficult time for our school culture, as GHS administration was being vilified by students, some parents, and on the radio airwaves.

GHS administrators discussed at length what to do with the remaining dances of the year. Despite various rumors that it was my decision to cancel dances, the senior class officers and the Student Council officers agreed not to hold their scheduled dances for the rest of the year. The senior class officers thought seniors would boycott any dance that was held and therefore, the hosting organization would not raise sufficient funds; in addition, Student Council did not want to deal with the hassle and headaches that dances had become. GHS administrators encouraged the seniors and Student Council to offer other events in the place of dances, but they chose not to do this.

Prom was held in May. The student decorum at Prom has always been better because they are dressed up, it is a classier event, they have paid significant money to be there, the dance has fewer students to monitor, there are far fewer younger students, and multiple other reasons, as well. Prom will continue to be held this year.

2015 – 16 School Year

The GHS administration concluded near the end of the 2014-15 school year that it was time to move in another direction regarding offering social, safe, and appropriate events for GHS students. The decision was made for the following significant reasons, among others:

- 1) We believe the US dance culture has moved beyond what a high school can condone or control effectively;
- 2) We want to offer inclusive, safe events that meet our core values and behavioral expectations;
- 3) We believe activity nights can be fun and still offer a safe place for all students, grades 9-12; to gather (such as a Homecoming bonfire);
- 4) There are other events that could be held that would raise money for Student Council and the senior class.

The hope, starting with the bonfire, is to create more inclusive, safe, and fun activities for GHS students.

Thanks for your continued support of GHS and Gorham Schools.

Chris Record, GHS Principal