

Date:

May 6, 2025

For Office Use

Gresham-Barlow School District
Citizens Comments to the Board

Name: Marjorie Mills Coleman

Phone: _____

District Resident: ☒ Yes ☐ No

Group / Organization: Individual/Family

Topic: Kelly Creek Elementary School

- Please submit this form with your written public comment to the board secretary, Sarah Avery, at avery4@gresham.k12.or.us by 4:00 p.m. the day of the meeting.
- The Board Chair, may require that a proposal, inquiry or request be submitted in writing, and reserves the right to refer the matter to the administration for action or study.
- Written comments may offer criticism of school operations and programs; however, the board will not review personal complaints concerning school personnel or against any person connected with the school system. If there is a legitimate complaint involving individuals, the chair will direct them to the appropriate means for board consideration and disposition.
- Please make sure to include your name for the record, whether you are a resident of the district, and the name of the group or organization you are representing, if applicable.
- Questions asked by the public will be referred to the superintendent for response at a later time.
- The board's regular business meetings are digitally recorded. They are also televised by MetroEast Community Media (www.metroeast.org) and Willamette Falls Media Center (www.wfmcstudios.org).

The board sincerely appreciates your interest in the Gresham-Barlow School District and thanks you for attending this meeting. ■

Gresham-Barlow School District
Citizens Comments to the Board

Members of the Board and Administrators for GBSD:

I write to you today to call upon the Board and District Administrators to address the crisis of violent behavior that is occurring at Kelly Creek Elementary. I write to you as a parent and as a member of the community with a vested interest in the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of the children of this community. I write to you not to sound an alarm, but to add my voice to those who have been sounding this alarm for months and, in some cases, years.

Several weeks ago, I reached out to the administration, stating my concerns as follows:

"Over the past three years I have volunteered regularly with my son's class. This has long been a difficult group, with a number of students exhibiting insubordinate and sometimes violent behaviors. Due to the slightly smaller overall numbers of this group, the students have repeatedly been split between only two classes instead of the typical three, placing a higher number of challenging students with each teacher. This has placed a disproportionate burden on the teachers and, based on observation, the close proximity of these students to each other has had a compounding effect.

I fear I may have been remiss in not raising my concerns about this situation earlier. Each year I have watched the faculty for this group, along with school staff, struggle to manage these volatile student behaviors. However, what I am seeing this year is an escalation above and beyond what I have previously seen. I regularly witness incidents where furniture is being thrown, students are screaming obscenities at the faculty, and school displays/materials are being destroyed during outbursts. This year I have observed these behaviors from students who did not previously exhibit them, in addition to the students who have been challenging in years past. To make matters worse, one of the veteran fourth grade teachers took a leave of absence mid-year and a substantially less experienced teacher was dropped into this environment, seemingly without additional support.

Plainly put, in these circumstances, the teachers cannot teach, and the students cannot learn.

I want to be perfectly clear on two points. First, I am not advocating for additional punishment or removal of the students in crisis. I appreciate and support the laws that govern student discipline and have faith that everything that can be done to address the challenges these students are having is being done. Second, I am not blaming the teachers or staff for this escalating problem. They conduct themselves with poise, professionalism, and a level of compassion that all should aspire to. My goal here is to plead with the administration to intervene in some way to help avert this looming crisis. My primary concern is that a student or staff member may be harmed. My secondary concern is for the academic and emotional impact this situation is having on the entire fourth grade cohort at Kelly Creek. Students are being denied the educational opportunities and physical and emotional safety that their peers in other schools, and indeed pupils in other grades at the same school, enjoy.

Finally, far below my first two concerns but still worthy of mentioning, I believe the district would be vulnerable to legal action in the event a student or staff member were to be harmed during one of these occurrences. This is a known threat that has been escalating for some time. To date, the risks have not been communicated to the parents and no substantial intervention has been staged."

In the weeks since I first voiced my concerns, I have continued to witness events of physical and verbal aggression, and the detrimental effects these events have had on the students that witness them regularly.

I believe that the administration has not been forthcoming with families about the severity and frequency of these occurrences. By concealing the problem, they are putting the burden of informing families and/or seeking support directly on the children. Some students will not be able to articulate these events and the distress they cause to their families. For others, the frequency of incidents has normalized them past the point of being "news" to tell at home. As I have said previously, I reject the idea that commonplace is the same as benign.

Kelly Creek is on its fifth principal since my older son first started kindergarten eight years ago. The students in one fourth grade classroom are on their fourth teacher this year. The school is constantly operating in crisis mode and, as such, the students peripheral to these events are being discounted as collateral damage.

I understand that the district is facing extraordinary circumstances. I am imploring the district to see this for the crisis it is and intervene by any means necessary. It is not too late to do better for our children.

Please check the box below and include a phone number if you would like to have someone contact you regarding the topic described above.



I would like to have someone contact me regarding my questions/ concerns at:

Phone Number

☐

Cell

☐

Home

☐

Work

The best time to reach me: _____

My schedule makes it difficult to speak on the phone, but I would welcome an email response.