2024-25 Annual Report to the Community

Graham Elementary and Middle School
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Columbus, OH 43201
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IRN – 011972

Co-Superintendent – Ed Ingman
Co-Superintendent - James Kutnow
Dean – Christina Conrad
Dean – Angelic Dean
Dean - Alen Auguste
Dean - Cassie Muller
Fiscal Agent – Jennifer L. Smith, CPA
School Year the School Opened – 2010-2011
Number of Students - 303
Grade Levels Served – K-8
Percentage of Students on IEP's – 40%
Percentage of Economically Disadvantaged Students – 100%
Student demographic percentages – 63% African American, 23% Caucasian, 7% Hispanic, 7% multiracial
Percentage of Students for whom English is their second language – 3%

Governing Authority
Graham Elementary and Middle School (GEMS) is chartered in the state of Ohio and as such, is overseen by the Ohio Department of Education & Workforce. Our sponsor is the Educational Service Center of Central Ohio (ESCCO). The GEMS Board of Directors provides governance, meeting a minimum of six times per year. A schedule of meeting dates and times, as well as a record of actions taken, are kept in the school's office and are available for review by the public. Board members in 2024-25 included: **Joyce Swayne**, President**; Ari Pompas,** Vice President; **Kitty King** Secretary/Treasurer, Howard Lipkin, and Jim Ziminski. GEMS partners with EL Education, national experts in effective educational practice using an expeditionary model. GEMS is a member of The Graham Family of Schools.

The Graham Elementary and Middle School Mission
As a member of The Graham Family of Schools and partner with EL Education, Graham Elementary & Middle School's (GEMS) mission is to provide a rigorous and engaging education while developing a strong sense of character and community among a diverse group of learners.

Special Accomplishments/Achievements
GEMS partners with EL Education, a national network that provides support and innovative curriculum with a vision of student success that integrates academic achievement, character, and high-quality work. GEMS successfully delivers curriculum and expeditions in which students complete fieldwork in partnership with professionals and professional organizations, Celebration of Learning events and student-led conferences.

GEMS is located near The Ohio State University in an historic building purchased in May 2017. We partner with multiple OSU programs including: OSU Honors & Scholars' (Adopt a School provides over 100 undergraduate students as volunteer tutors); The Office of Student Life, and a variety of departments on campus to supplement our curriculum including the Department of Teaching and Learning.

Launched in the fall of 2015, Play Us Forward, a partnership between ProMusica Chamber Orchestra, GEMS, and United Schools Network, has provided a shared music instructor and free instruments for 5th-8th grade students in partner charter schools. Play Us Forward's goal is to remove barriers of participation in individual instrumental instruction by providing instruction and instruments at no cost to students or their families. Through this partnership, we aim to create a model of musical instruction, and provide positive opportunities for artistic expression and overall academic enhancement for each student involved.

Honors/Recognitions/Special Occasions
At the end of each quarter, an awards ceremony is planned in which students are recognized from each grade level for their contribution to the GEMS community as leaders. Awards include the Exemplary Citizen Award, the Expedition Leader Award and The Golden Ruler Award. GEMS also recognizes students who show more than 10 points of growth on their MAP assessments from Fall to Winter and from Winter to Spring.

Grades K-5 and 6-8 held Community Meetings once per month during which students, staff, and family members highlighted the five Habits of Learning: Responsibility, Perseverance, Quality, Thoughtfulness, and Teamwork. Meetings helped build school culture through highlighting quality work and student achievement. During Community Meeting, teachers recognized students by providing Habits of Learning certificates.

Celebrating Our Work Together
During Better World Day in early May, students exhibited work from their learning expeditions during celebrations of their learning. All grade levels participate and celebrate this work in partnership with a wide range of community organizations and experts. In particular, seventh graders shared the impact of how our many cultures have crossed and shaped the country and gained podcast development skills through partnerships with the Ohio Historical Society, WOSU, and Musicology Recording Studios.

GAP
In partnership with Communities in Schools (CIS) GEMS hosted two daily after school programs for K-4 students and 5-8 students. The programs were free to our students and partially funded by a Nita M. Lowery 21st Century Community Learning Centers Grant. OSU students from the Department of Teaching and Learning assisted our program staff in all areas including homework help, ELA and Math enrichment, Social and Emotional Learning activities, career exploration and expeditions.

Partners
Thank you to our generous partners. Your support makes it possible for us to continue providing a high quality experiential education to our students!

Rich and Kitty King, Katherine Lin, Sara Neikirk, Marci B. Ryan, and Joyce Swayne.

Columbus Zoo, Communities in Schools, Nita M Lowery 21st Century Community Learning Center Grant Program, Huntington Bank, The Ohio State University, State of Ohio/Ohio Department of Education & Workforce, OSU Evans Scholars, Ohio Department of Natural Resources, ProMusica Chamber Orchestra Play Us Forward Program, The Marcus Project, Adopt-A-School, True Love Transcends, and Junior Achievement.

Federal Funding
GEMS is designated as a School-wide Title program, enabling us to receive Federal Funds to ensure that all of our students receive the support they need to reach and exceed grade level goals in reading and math. Funds also support professional development for teachers and administrators, resources for students with disabilities, and well rounded education opportunities including fieldwork. Federal funds received this year included Title IA, Title IIA, Title III, Title IVA, IDEA-B, IDEA Early Childhood Special Education, and Stronger Connections Grant.

The performance standards by which the success of the school was evaluated by the sponsor during the 2024-25 school year, and the method of measurement that was used by the sponsor (ESCCO) to determine progress toward goals.
The sponsor has established a high stakes rubric with which it evaluates its schools annually by evaluating Academic Performance, Fiscal Performance, and Organizational/Operational Performance. The sponsor uses the annual state report card, MAP Assessment scores, fiscal and operational rubrics, and other mission specific measures. These rubrics are also used for sponsor contract renewal, a process successfully completed during FY24 resulting in a renewed 3 year contract. The sponsor attends board meetings, has periodic meetings with leadership and initiates site visits during the school year.

Contractually stated goals aligned with the ONE Plan (FY25-27)
1. Safe and Healthy Schools: 50% or more of GEMS students will have a "favorable" perspective in Growth Mindset, Self-Efficacy and Sense of Belonging as measured with Panorama two times per year over three years.
2. English/Language Arts: Increase the number of students proficient or higher in grades 3-8 ELA end of course exams by 5% over three years.
3. Mathematics: Increase the number of 3-8 students proficient or higher in Math end of year course exams by 5% over three years.

Names of Assessments Given at the School and the Results
To monitor schoolwide academic progress and achievement, GEMS uses NWEA MAP, Panorama, and Ohio State Tests. MAP Math and Reading assessments are administered fall, winter, spring to students in grades K-8 and are used to analyze and monitor student academic growth, guide instructional practices in the classroom, and summarize school performance. MAP Normative and Comparative Data is used by school leader(s) and staff for identifying and qualifying students for various instructional strategies and class schedules. NWEA MAP's methodology includes a large and reflective sample using nine terms of data and a new model for estimating student growth. GEMS uses this data to monitor and analyze student growth in the classroom towards proficiency on Ohio's State Tests. Students in the state of Ohio are required to take Ohio's State Tests in grades 3 through 8, the results of which are presented on the state report card. As part of our formalized initiative in Social and Emotional Learning, GEMS used the Panorama Survey to help us identify student progress toward SEL goals. The GEMS staff meets in data teams throughout the year to evaluate student progress as well as set teaching and learning goals.

Spring **MAP results** show the effective use of the ELA and Math curriculum with support and PD from EL Education that leads our work across all grades. Grade level achievement measures show significant progress/growth which is also reflected in the Ohio State Report Card.

Panorama data focused on our priorities of Growth Mindset, Self-Efficacy and Sense of Belonging showed growth in all areas. We are on track to meet our goals in all three areas. Our analysis of this data leads us to consider the lingering impact of the pandemic on student and school culture and individual self-awareness; and our need to continue attending to building culture and foundational academics. It also supports our renewed focus on Trauma Responsive Educational Practices(TREP), an area for which we have written a 5 year implementation plan.

The Ohio State Report Card
The Ohio State Report Card rates schools with a 5 star system. GEMS received 3 stars for Overall School Performance, 2 stars in Achievement on the Ohio State Tests; **4 stars in Progress which measures student academic growth as compared to the previous year;** 2 stars in Gap Closing which combines a variety of measures including achievement, progress, and attendance; and 1 star in Early Literacy which measures K-3rd grade reading growth and achievement.

The school significantly exceeded overall growth expectations, which is a strong indicator of student improvement over time. This suggests that interventions and instructional strategies implemented are having a positive effect, particularly in helping students grow from where they started. GEMS continues to close the gap for early literacy and work with students to provide support towards proficient reading levels on the state tests. While we recognize that there is work to be done, these results reflect the tremendous progress we have made as a community.

The 2024-2025 Report Cards give us a snapshot of student achievement and growth as well as teacher effectiveness. During this school year we established goals for our students and teachers academically, socially and culturally. We created work-plans to address ongoing social emotional trauma, and challenges of attendance, engagement and self-direction. Our primary focus is growth every day. Having a Growth Mindset amongst students and staff is essential. We meet students where they are, focus on the whole child, differentiate instruction and move students forward academically.

The school's activities toward and progress in meeting those contractually stated academic goals
GEMS has completed its fifteenth year and is actively engaged in continuing to meet academic goals. New curriculum which includes consistent coaching and resources are in place for ELA and Math. A supplemental math course was implemented, providing two additional math periods per week, and a reading initiative continues with all students independently reading during two full crew periods each week. GEMS teachers meet regularly after school in grade level teams to collaboratively build and implement cross-disciplinary expeditions. GEMS teachers also meet regularly to discuss and integrate student data. GEMS teachers participate in over 10 scheduled professional development days annually led by our EL school designer and other partner experts, and guided by our school's work plan. As a brief review of our initiatives to address our improvement needs, we have:

- Built a school improvement plan focusing on goals in Social and Emotional Learning, English Language Arts, and Mathematics aligned to our work plan and the ONE Plan.
- Expanded our RTI/MTSS program
- Empowered our Director of Social and Emotional Learning to help us better understand our students' non-academic needs that directly impact their ability to learn, and to design strategies that help our students become more aware of their own needs and available resources.
- Focused on understanding the impact of trauma on children's brains and thus their learning, and the use of Trauma Responsive Practices in all areas of our work.
- Expanded work around Restorative Practices, helping us find new ways to address school culture and student behavior that's the most instructive for a child's growth.
- Maintained two after school programs focusing on SEL, ELA and Math enrichment and support as well as career exploration.
- Maintained our strong partnership with EL Education to continuously improve our expeditionary focus integrated with academic growth and achievement goals in all core curricular areas based on Ohio and Common Core Standards.

Academic Curriculum Requirements including EL Education Curriculum
GEMS' academic and expeditionary curriculum fully incorporates Ohio and Common Core Standards. Interim and end of course assessments are part of our model. Our focus is on preparing students for high school by helping all of our students achieve or supersede grade level expectations in math, reading and writing. Our goal is to build lifelong learners.

EL Education provides school leaders and teachers with professional development, curriculum planning resources, and school structures to boost student engagement, character, and achievement. EL exists in over 152 schools in over 35 states nationwide. The EL model is a proven success in supporting schools in developing a positive school culture and higher achievement scores when compared to the school districts in which they exist. EL and GEMS together developed the school's habits of learning: perseverance, responsibility, thoughtfulness, teamwork, and quality.

As an EL Education school, we define success as having three dimensions: “Knowledge and Skills,” “Character,” and “High Quality Work.” Our Crews intensives have been focusing not only on academic support for our students but also on Social and Emotional Learning depending on students needs. Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is based on the understanding that the best learning emerges in the context of supportive relationships that make learning challenging, engaging, and meaningful.

Expeditions for K-5th Graders
Kindergarten:
Kindergarten students began the year by learning about toys, play, and sharing in order to be good classmates. Students studied different attributes of toys, such as a shape and color. Then students shifted their focus to discussing what their favorite toys are and why. Students created their own stuffed animals and shared them at our celebration of learning.

Kindergarten built their literacy and science skills as they engaged in a study of weather. Students began by building knowledge of different types of weather and then moved to how weather differs around the world and how it affects people. Students became experts on weather and created books where they explained the weather and gave advice on how to prepare for it.

Kindergarten students then learned about the importance of living things by studying plants and trees. Students explored the life cycle of a plant and how a tiny seed becomes a tree. Then, students learned about what trees need to survive and the different parts of a tree during fieldwork at the Franklin Park Conservatory.

1st Grade:
In the fall, students focused on tools and work. Students first learned about how tools help to do a job. They then extended their understanding of what it takes to do a job when they learned how the "habits of character" of initiative, collaboration, perseverance, and responsibility help them do work. At the end of the module, students used all they had learned about tools and work to create a "magnificent thing" that fulfilled an authentic classroom need (e.g., pencil holder for classroom use).

In the winter, students built their literacy and science skills as they engaged in a study of the sun, moon, and stars. Students used their growing understanding of descriptive language, author's craft, and patterns of the sun and moon to compose a narrative poem titled: *What the Sun Sees*. They visited the OSU planetarium to learn more.

In the spring, first graders became ornithologists (scientists that study birds). They completed research using books, images, and videos in order to answer the guiding question: “How can people care for birds and their environment so they can live and grow?” First graders had to pay close attention to different types of beaks and feathers and how each of these body parts helped a species of birds. They helped hatch chicks from our partnership with Bring the Farm to You and shared their learning through beautiful bird books.

2nd Grade:
In the fall, second graders learned about schools around the world. They studied how schools have adapted and changed when communities are faced with disasters or hardships. Students wrote a book comparing and contrasting different aspects of school from around the world.

For their second expedition, 2nd grade dug into the world of fossils and dinosaurs. They became paleontologists, studying the work of Mary Anning in order to learn about the kinds of things paleontologists do. Reading the book Stone Girl, Bone Girl by Laurence Anholt also allowed students to study the structure and craft of narrative writing. Finally, students produced a detailed drawing of a fossil and wrote their own narrative piece about a fictional paleontologist of their design!

During their final expedition of the year, second graders studied the "secret world of pollination." They learned to navigate informational text and deepened their understanding of how plants grow and thrive. They then became entomologists, studying pollinators such as bees, hummingbirds, and butterflies in their expert research groups. They visited the Franklin Park Conservatory to complete their research.

3rd Grade:
For their first expedition, 3rd grade students learned about the power of literacy and how people around the world overcome learning challenges. Students studied the book My Librarian Is a Camel by Margriet Ruurs to learn about how librarians all over the world overcome challenges to get books to children. Students enjoyed learning new technology skills when they created comic strips about how they overcome their own learning challenges at school.

During their second expedition, 3rd graders became herpetologists. They studied the habitats and adaptations of various "Freaky Frogs." 3rd graders studied *Pourquois tales* and informational text about frogs and practiced using both narrative and informational writing.

For their final expedition, Students answer the question: What can we learn from reading literary classics? In this module, students consider the answer to this question through a case study of Peter Pan by J.M. Barrie. Once students finished reading Peter Pan, in the second half of Unit 2, they wrote a book review explaining whether they would recommend the story to a friend. Lastly, for the performance task, students acted out their revised scenes to an audience before explaining how and why they revised the scene.

4th Grade:
At the beginning of the year, fourth graders became poets. Students learned about the history and power of poetry, alongside different types of poems and their features. Students studied Love That Dog by Sharon Creech, as well as The Red Wheelbarrow by William Carlos Williams and Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening by Robert Frost. Students learned about what inspires writers to write and explored their own inspirations. 4th grade poets finished the module by hosting a poetry night, inviting the community in to hear their own original verse.

4th grade's second module of the year allowed them to build their skills as scientists and researchers. Students studied defense mechanisms of animals. After digging deeply into research in their expert groups, students produced an informational writing piece to describe their animal's physical characteristics, habitat, predators, and defense mechanisms. They visited the zoo to further study these defense mechanisms.

5th Grade:
Human Rights Revolution! -- "What are human rights, and how do real people and fictional characters respond when those rights are challenged?" Students developed their ability to read and understand complex text as they considered this question. Students began to build knowledge about human rights through a close read of the introduction and selected articles of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)*, paired with short firsthand accounts of people around the world who currently face human rights challenges. In Unit 2, students did an extended study of Esperanza Rising (740L) by Pam Muñoz Ryan, applying their new learning about human rights as one lens through which to interpret the character and theme in this rich novel—a complex coming-of-age story set in Mexico and rural California during the early 1930s. Through close reading, interpretation, and analysis of fiction and nonfiction texts, students synthesized their understanding of human rights. The specific literacy focus was on supporting understanding through quoting directly from text, inferring themes, and comparing and contrasting how different texts address the topics and themes of human rights.

Everybody's Zooin' It! – Through this expedition students learned about animal rights and the needs of animals at the Columbus zoo. The students learned about different habitats and how animals need different habitats to sustain themselves. They learned about the food webs and different characteristics of animals based on their diet. Students discussed and created a habitat that needed to be redone for a new animal

coming to the Columbus zoo. The habitat will be reviewed by the Columbus zoo staff and they could pick the idea of the habitat for the incoming animal. Students worked on this habitat project with budget and space considerations in mind.

Expeditions for 6th-8th Graders

Heroes (6th Grade) - Students embarked on an exploration of heroism by reading Percy Jackson and studying the concept of the hero's journey. They extended their learning by visiting a local fire department, where they discovered real-life heroes within the GEMS community. To culminate the experience, students wrote and performed an original play inspired by Percy Jackson, showcasing their understanding of heroism in both myth and real life.

Career Exploration (6th Grade) - Students learned more about who they are and their likes, interests, and skills that can be applied to a future career. In math students created a budget based on their future career choices. Students then wrote an informative paper explaining their career, salary, skills and education requirements, financial values, and training needed.

Epidemics (7th Grade) – Students explored the history of global disease outbreaks through Patient Zero by Marilee Peters. They investigated how epidemics spread and examined the contributions of scientists and epidemiologists. Students met with experts who studied diseases, gaining real-world insights into public health efforts. As a culminating project, students scripted and recorded podcasts about an epidemic that particularly interested them, demonstrating their understanding of the scientific and societal impacts of these health crises.

A Long Walk to Water (7th Grade) - Students engaged with A Long Walk to Water*,* by Linda Sue Park, exploring themes of perseverance, survival, and social change through the story of Salva Dut and the global water crisis. In addition to meeting with experts, students deepened their understanding by writing children's books that captured their learning. They then read these books to elementary students, sharing the lessons they had gained about the importance of water access and the resilience of individuals facing adversity.

Food Justice (8th Grade) - In this expedition, students used the school garden to learn about nutritious eating and the injustice in food choices in schools and historically excluded communities. We looked at the history of agriculture as it relates to society and culture. We also analyzed the policies behind school lunches in the US and compared our school lunches to the national guidelines as well as global policies.

Identity (8th Grade) - Gandhi once said, "'Be the change you wish to see in the world." Students asked the question, "Who am I?" Through this unit they studied identity groups and discovered their voice. They learned how historical, biological and statistical details affect each individual's identity within the school community and the world. Students read Maus, by Art Spiegelman to explore how people's sense of belonging was changed during the Holocaust. And then Farewell to Manzanar by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston to learn about the experience of Japanese Americans during World War II. We connected identity to a sense of belonging within a community and then our 8th grade students created documentaries by interviewing GEMS community members, family and OSU students to determine what it means to belong.

Staff Members

The full-time and part-time staff roster in the 2024-25 school year included: Debbie Addison, Alen Auguste, Mary Balderaz, Cathy Baney, Kevin Beery, Stacey Bittinger, Samantha Brantley, Claire Bubeck, Taylor Bush, Loren Collins, Christina Conrad, Emma Creech, Chrys Cruise, Miles Cummings, Angelic Dean, Max Dubois, Leonard Farquharson, Carissa Ferguson, Morgan Fetsko, Colleen Flowers, Susan Frank, Olivia Frishkorn, Asia Harris, Anjali Haury, Valerie Hessler, Clifton Hurd, Edmund Ingman, Logan Kamphaus, Alexandra Konet, Jill Kovacs, James Kutnow, Katie Logan, Cheryl Long, Karly Manley, Diana Marcil, Amanda Mccain, Shayla Mcdonald, Melinda Mcfann, Angela Meabon, Claire Mitchell, Cassie Muller, Cassidy Neff, Fatlinda Nini, Kelli Orians, Eileen O'Sullivan, Dia'Tiana Peck, Sarah Pfirman, Tazjuana Porter, Evan Rulong, Julianna Schlatter,

Amy Simeral, Jennifer Smith, Audrey Snyder, Sarah Solley, Chris Spackman, Zachary Steinberger, Eliot Stevens, Alexis Taylor, Kearston Tufford, Jennifer Waddell, Christina Wagner, Jeff Wiseman, and Zhu Yijing

Financial Status

In fiscal year 2024-25 the school received $4,057,851 in state funds. The school also received $656,426 in federal funds and $45,874 in development and rental income funds, among other separated categories. Sources of income totaled $4,760,151. In fiscal year 2024-25 the school paid for employee salaries and benefits, including payroll taxes and retirement, through The Graham School, GEMS's financial manager, and paid $139,015 in loan payments for the purchase of the 16th Avenue building. Uses, including the aforementioned items along with classroom support expenses, utilities, insurance and assorted services to and purchases for the school, totaled $4,974,741 in expenses. When the current cash in bank was added to the sources, the year-end adjusted cash balance was $402,183 to be carried over to 2025-26. The school conducts its own on-going internal financial audit under the direction of its Board Audit Committee and treasurer Jennifer Smith, CPA. Finances also were audited by the school's sponsor, The Educational Service Center of Central Ohio. And, the school is audited annually under the auspices of the State of Ohio Auditor's Office. All found the finances to be accounted for accurately and appropriately.