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### **When life throws a pandemic, learn to play the ukulele and ice skate**

At least, that has been the message to Gordon-Rushville Public School (GRPS) students during the COVID pandemic. School administration allowed staff to offer a middle school ukulele and guitar class as a safer alternative to traditional band with wind and brass instruments.

“It’s so fun watching and listening to the kids learn to play. My favorite is peeking in while they are playing and singing along to a mask-muffled version of ‘Fishing in the Dark’,” shared Lori Liggett, GRPS Superintendent.

They are finalizing the ice-skating rink on the practice field just west of the high school and anticipate kiddos will be able to use it for physical education classes when they start back from the holiday break as they need three consecutive nights of below zero weather to harden the surface. The outdoors will offer a safer alternative to indoor physical education classes, a new skill to learn, and fresh air during the school day.

GRPS has taken a strong stance on their COVID prevention strategies since the start of school this fall, and it has proven effective. Liggett shared how devastating it was to have to close the school in the spring and they wanted to take every necessary precaution to keep kids in school and learning for the many mental, social, and physical benefits school provides.

The school has partnered with Panhandle Public Health District and the Nebraska Department of Education’s Healthy Schools program to increase their environment for student and staff wellness. Grow Towers create fresh, healthy salad ingredients, free breakfast and lunch programs provide all students the necessary nutrition for healthy, growing bodies and minds, brain-boosting activity “breaks” stimulate and engage their minds throughout the day, and staff have access to a trained counselor for virtual group sessions to keep their mental wellness in-check.

Additionally, they have worked intently with PPHD, the hospital, the city, and other community members to increase active living in the community. Safer, connected streets and sidewalks are key to students walking or biking to-and-from school and around the community.

So, for now, as the world continues forward with the chaos of trying to traverse one of the most uncertain times we have ever collectively experienced, GRPS students will be making the most of it with ice skating and ukuleles and quite possibly the most important life lesson.

Panhandle Public Health District is working together to improve the health, safety, and quality of life for all who live, learn, work, and play in the Panhandle. Our vision is that we are a healthier and safer Panhandle Community. Visit our website [www.pphd.org](http://www.pphd.org).