

Courage to Climb: A Directional System for Galion City Schools

Preamble

Galion City Schools has long been a place where students, educators, families, and community members share a deep sense of connection and pride. Throughout its history, the district has been shaped by a commitment to supporting young people, celebrating community traditions, and preparing students to contribute meaningfully to the world around them.

The Galion community engaged in a thoughtful process of reflection and conversation about the future of its schools. Teachers, staff, parents, administrators, students, and community members shared their hopes, expectations, and aspirations for Galion's students. Their voices revealed a common vision: a school system where students are challenged academically, supported personally, and inspired to grow into individuals who make a positive difference in their community.

Across these conversations, several powerful ideas consistently emerged. The Galion community values strong relationships, high expectations paired with meaningful support, and learning experiences that help students connect their knowledge and character to the world beyond the classroom. Just as importantly, participants spoke about the importance of trust, collaboration, and a shared sense of purpose among the adults who serve students each day.

The phrase “Courage to Climb” captures the spirit of this work. Climbing requires perseverance, resilience, and belief in one’s ability to grow. For students, it represents the courage to face challenges, learn from mistakes, and pursue their goals with determination. For educators and staff, it represents the commitment to support students while continually improving their own practice. For the Galion community, it reflects a shared belief that progress comes from working together and lifting one another along the way.

This directional system represents the Galion community’s shared commitments moving forward. It clarifies the beliefs that guide our work, the vision we hold for our students, and the promises we make about the experiences students will have in Galion classrooms and schools. It also defines the roles we all play—students, educators, leaders, families, and community members—in helping every learner grow and succeed.

At its heart, this work reflects a simple but powerful belief:

Education in Galion prepares students not only for their own success, but for the success of the community we call home.

As Galion students develop knowledge, character, and courage, they also learn the importance of contributing to something greater than themselves. Their growth strengthens the community today and helps shape a better future.

Together, we climb.

Mantra

Courage to Climb

Vision (what we hope for the future)

Developing students of knowledge, character, and courage to strengthen the community and shape the future.

Mission (what we do every day)

Engage every student in rigorous, meaningful learning that builds knowledge, character, and resilience.

Core Beliefs

1. Every Person Has Value, Potential, and Worth

We believe every student possesses unique strengths, talents, and potential. Our responsibility is to create an environment where all students feel valued, supported, and challenged to grow. Through strong relationships and encouragement, we help students discover who they are and who they can become.

2. Learning Requires Both High Expectations and Strong Support

We believe students achieve their greatest growth when they are challenged to do difficult things and supported along the way. We do this by maintaining high academic standards while providing encouragement, guidance, and resources. We cultivate resilience, confidence, and perseverance.

3. Character and Integrity Matter as Much as Achievement

We believe education develops both mind and character, fostering honesty, empathy, responsibility, and resilience in every learner.

4. Learning Should Be Authentic, Engaging, and Meaningful

We believe the most powerful learning experiences are active, collaborative, and connected to real life. Teachers serve as designers of engaging learning opportunities that intentionally incorporate the components of authentic learning to deepen engagement and inspire curiosity, creativity, and problem-solving.

5. Strong Relationships and Community Partnerships Strengthen Learning

We believe student success is a shared responsibility among schools, families, and the community. Through collaboration and communication, we create a network of support that nurtures student growth.

6. Education Prepares Everyone to Contribute to Something Bigger Than Themselves

We believe the purpose of education extends beyond individual success. Galion students develop the knowledge, character, and leadership needed to strengthen their community and shape a better future.

From Beliefs to Practice

The beliefs we hold about students and learning must be visible in the experiences we create for them every day. If we are to live out our core beliefs, what must teaching and learning look like every day in Galion classrooms?

Our Commitments

The following instructional commitments describe the learning experiences we promise to design for every student.

1. Learning Will Be Meaningful and Authentic

We commit to designing learning experiences that are engaging, relevant, and connected to real life. Students will regularly apply their knowledge through problem-solving, collaboration, creativity, and authentic tasks that prepare them for the world beyond the classroom.

2. Every Student Will Be Known, Supported, and Challenged

We commit to building strong relationships with every student and providing the support necessary for success. At the same time, we will maintain high expectations and encourage students to persevere through challenges, building confidence and resilience as they grow.

3. Students Will Be Active Participants in Their Learning

We commit to creating learning environments where students think deeply, ask questions, collaborate with peers, and take ownership of their learning. Students will be encouraged to explore ideas, take intellectual risks, and develop the skills needed for lifelong learning.

4. Learning Will Develop the Whole Child

We commit to supporting the academic, social, emotional, and personal development of every student. Through strong relationships, social-emotional learning, restorative practices, extracurricular opportunities, and supportive school cultures, we help students grow into well-rounded individuals.

5. Learning Will Prepare Students to Contribute to Their Community and Larger Society

We commit to helping students understand that their learning has purpose beyond the classroom. Through authentic learning experiences that include leadership opportunities, service, collaboration, and real-world connections, students will develop the knowledge, character, and courage needed to strengthen their community and the world around them both in the future and in the here and now.

Our Promises

Strong schools are built not only on clear expectations for students, but also on the leadership culture that supports the adults who serve them.

1. We Will Lead with Trust and Professional Respect

We believe the people closest to students are essential partners in shaping strong schools. We will honor the expertise of educators and staff, treat one another as professionals, and assume positive intent as we work together on behalf of students.

2. We Will Pair High Expectations with Strong Support

Just as we challenge students to grow, we will ensure that educators and staff have the support they need to succeed. Clear expectations, meaningful feedback, professional learning, and collaborative problem-solving will guide our work.

3. We Will Communicate with Transparency and Listen with Curiosity

Open communication builds trust. We commit to sharing information clearly, explaining the “why” behind decisions, and listening thoughtfully to the perspectives of others.

4. We Will Address Challenges Through Restorative Practices

When challenges arise, we will focus on learning, accountability, and repairing relationships. Through shared norms and restorative approaches, we will work together to resolve concerns and strengthen trust.

5. We Will Keep Students at the Center of Our Decisions

All school decisions are guided by what best supports student growth and well-being.

6. We Will Model the Courage to Climb

Leadership requires humility, resilience, and the willingness to grow. We commit to modeling the courage we ask of our students and our staff.

Our Norms for Working Together

Building trust and strong collaboration requires courage. These norms reflect how we support one another as we work toward our shared vision.

Be Present - Engage fully in the work and conversations at hand.

Share the Air - Ensure all voices have the opportunity to contribute.

Be Solution-Oriented - Focus on possibilities and next steps, moving conversations from challenges to actionable ways forward.

Use “What If” Thinking - Approach ideas with curiosity and openness, exploring possibilities rather than shutting them down.

Assume Positive Intent - Approach colleagues with respect and the belief that we all want the best for students and each other.

Seek First to Understand - Listen deeply to others’ perspectives before responding, ensuring clarity and mutual understanding.

Own & Reflect on Your Impact - Reflect on how our words and actions affect others and our shared work.

Ground Statements in Evidence - Use data, experience, and student outcomes to guide our conversations and decisions.

Roles of the Educational Community

Students

Take ownership of learning, persevere through challenges, and contribute positively to the school community.

Educators and Staff

Design engaging learning experiences, build relationships, and support student growth.

School and District Leaders

Promote the directional system by creating conditions for success through trust, communication, and support.

Board of Education

Upholds the directional system, ensures accountability, and serves as a vital link and advocate between the schools and the community.

Families

Partner with schools to encourage learning, maintain communication, and support student growth.

Community Partners

Provide opportunities and support that strengthen student learning and community pride.

Portrait of a Tiger

Existing district Portrait of a Graduate retained here