Proposal to Start Wrestling

Rationale

GPL currently offers two competitive sports for boys and girls in the fall and spring. In the fall, approximately 80 students participate in cross country, football and volleyball. An additional 10 students participate in football cheer. In the spring, approximately 80 students participate in golf and track. Winter is the only season with one competitive sport. Approximately 55 students participate in basketball, and an additional 10-15 students participate in basketball cheer. Winter appears to be the season where another sports offering could encourage and enable more students to experience the blessings of participation in interscholastic sports at GPL. Note: With the exception of starting the clay target shooting club in 2024, GPL hasn't added an SDHSAA sanctioned sport since football in 2003 and girls golf in 2005. Our school has grown substantially since then but our athletic program offerings haven't expanded with this growth.

The Vision for GPL Athletics encourages careful analysis of the following factors when considering adding a sport:

1. Students' needs/interests
2. Enrollment benchmarks that can support quality programs
3. Ways new programs may enhance or detract from existing programs
4. Opportunities for interscholastic competition (i.e. Do the schools with whom GPL typically competes commonly offer the sport?)

Some thoughts on each of these factors related to wrestling:

1. A survey conducted of freshmen, sophomores, and juniors in spring of 2026 indicated that 8 students (3 girls and 5 boys) would seriously consider participating in wrestling if it was offered (five of these are not currently in a winter sport). **SURVEY RESULTS** Very few current students have experience in wrestling. It would likely take time for a new program like this to gain momentum and participation to grow. Low initial participation would not be a problem; invitational meets would not necessitate weight classes being filled as would a dual or triangular meet. A current GPL family has indicated that there are several WELS families in Sioux Falls involved in wrestling. The new principal in Brookings has two sons who wrestle. He indicated that they are considering both Luther Prep and GPL for high school, and their 8th grader is leaning toward Luther Prep because it has a wrestling program. These few families demonstrate that there are students out there who wrestle and it may impact their high school decision.
2. GPL's current and growing enrollment sufficiently supports approximately 80 students participating in fall and spring competitive sports. It seems likely the same would be true in the winter if another competitive sport was offered.

3. The head basketball coaches do not believe that wrestling would have a negative impact on their programs. The football and track coaches believe that wrestling would complement their sports very well, as it would promote the development of athletic attributes such as power, balance, leverage, and agility.
4. With GPL being a Class A school for the foreseeable future, our volleyball and basketball schedules are evolving to include more competitive Class A competition. There are many local Region 1A and 2A schools with whom GPL commonly competes that offer wrestling, several of which include (9-12 enrollments and wrestling participation in parenthesis) Hamlin (233), Clark/Willow Lake (159, 18 B and 6 G), Deuel (160), Sisseton (296), Milbank (359, 20 B and 5 G), Britton-Hecla (130), Sioux Valley (224), Webster (161, 9 B and 3 G), Redfield (160), Groton (175, 20 B and 1 G) and Elkton-Lake Benton (130). Additionally, several ECC schools (Waverly-South Shore, Waubay/Summit, and Florence/Henry) are seriously considering adding wrestling.

Facilities/Equipment

- Practice - GPL's two gymnasiums allow both genders of basketball to practice after school and finish before supper. It would not be ideal to go back to an early/late practice routine with wrestling in the mix, but it could be considered. It is believed that wrestling could practice in a space like the cafeteria. If/when the south end of the gym is remodeled to include a second level, making the second level a wrestling practice room could be considered. Gym space could be used for wrestling practice after school when basketball teams play on the road.
- Competition - Our wrestling program would participate in invitational meets that have junior high, JV, and Varsity levels. GPL would not need to initially host wrestling competitions. If time and resources allowed the necessary equipment to be acquired, hosting competitions could eventually be considered. Presently our XC and T&F programs do not have any home events.
- Mats - Depending on the number of participants, at least one mat will be needed for practice. As resources allow, we can consider purchasing new or used wrestling mats. Storing them behind the curtain in the north gym or in the south gym along the wall would be feasible. We have other athletic equipment stored in these areas.
- Uniforms - Uniforms would be purchased with Active Ministry funds like all other athletic uniforms. A singlet costs approximately $80.
- Headgear, mouthguards, wrestling shoes and warmups would be purchased by participants.
- Other - A quality scale for monitoring wrestlers' weight would be needed.

Coach

This will likely be the most challenging need to fill. Options could be a local WELS person or a called worker. We currently appear to have neither, but we could put the feelers out to WELS churches within 30 minutes of GPL and see if anything surfaces. We could also consider a WELS figurehead coach (organizer, bring the ministry to the sport) with a non-WELS assistant who knows how to coach wrestling. When we have the opportunity to call to fill an open position at GPL, we could consider including wrestling as desired extra duty. Our **Coach Handbook**

outlines the standards and responsibilities we have for our coaches. In addition, we would work to ensure that our wrestling coach has a healthy approach to monitoring weight and is prepared to work with female wrestlers.

Genders
The SDHSAA sanctions both boys and girls wrestling, and it would seem to make sense to offer both sexes this opportunity to participate in a competitive sport during the winter. Depending on participation, careful consideration would need to be given to how practices are conducted. While it is preferred that boys and girls not wrestle each other, there are schools that carefully allow it in practice out of necessity. Boys would not be wrestling girls in competition. From the local schools who shared information with me, it appears that the ratio of boys to girls in wrestling is about 4 or 5 to 1.

Development of Wrestlers
As with all of GPL's athletic programs, there will be a need and desire to help future Panthers gain experience in the sport before starting high school. It is unlikely that any of the GPL Schools would be able to offer wrestling. There are community club programs in which interested students could participate. GPL may be able to offer development opportunities such as Panther Camp. It would be ideal to include St. Martin's 7th and 8th graders in wrestling as we do in other sports such as FB, XC, golf, and track.

Financial Impact
- Startup costs (outside the budget; event program revenue, possibly donations)
    - Practice mat: $4000
    - Additional wall matting for safety: $2000
    - Scale for monitoring weight - $400-600
    - TOTAL: $6400
- First year budgetary costs
    - Meet entry fees: $150*15 = $2250
    - Uniforms: $80 x 15 = $1200
    - Head coach stipend (if not called worker): $2340
    - Assistant coach stipend (if not called worker): $1250
    - Coach association membership: $90
    - Mat tape: $100
    - Mat disinfectant: $50
    - Athletic training supplies: $300
    - Annual scale calibration: $50
    - Transportation: 150 mi x 15 meets x $4/gal / 20 mpg = $450 (assuming van to start, bus would have higher cost)
    - State meet lodging and meals: none first year
    - TOTAL: $8080 (While included here, coach compensation and student transportation are accounted for separately in the budget.)
- Normal year budgetary costs (no uniform purchase)
    - Meet entry fees: $150*15 = $2250

    - Head coach stipend (if not called worker) - $2340
    - Assistant coach stipend (if not called worker): $1250
    - Coach association membership: $90
    - Mat tape: $100
    - Mat disinfectant: $50
    - Athletic training supplies: $300
    - Annual scale calibration: $50
    - Transportation: 150 mi x 15 meets x $4/gal / 20 mpg = $450 (assuming van to start, bus would have higher cost)
    - State meet lodging and meals: $1000
    - TOTAL: $7880 (While included here, coach compensation and student transportation are accounted for separately in the budget.)
- Costs incurred by wrestlers
    - Attire - warmups, practice singlets if needed
    - Protective gear - ear guards, knee/elbow pads, etc.
    - Shoes

Starting the Program

- Decision - If the Board approves the start of wrestling in September, the Delegates can consider the recommendation to start wrestling in November. If approved, the first priority will be acquiring a coach to move the program forward.
- SDHSAA - We would submit a formal request to the SDHSAA to be added as a school that offers wrestling. This would be considered at their next scheduled meeting (upcoming meetings in Nov, Jan, Mar, and Apr)
- Student-athletes - The program would be offered to boys and girls. I believe that a solid start to a wrestling program at GPL would include 6-10 student-athletes, and I believe this is possible. The program has the potential to grow with the participation of St. Martin's 7th and 8th graders (**INTEREST FORM**). Once our GPL Schools know that GPL has a wrestling program, families with children interested in wrestling can start with youth programs in their communities to prepare them for the high school level when they get to GPL. In **THESE GUIDELINES** for St. Martin's students participating in GPL athletics, I would treat wrestling similarly to cross country and golf.
- Program building and development opportunities - The same strategies our other sports use to encourage and prepare students for their sports would be used with wrestling. Wrestling could be an offering at Panther Camp to expose students to the sport and encourage them to consider participating. Summer "open mat" opportunities as well as camps would be offered.
- Competition - We would enter our athletes in meets at their appropriate level - JH, JV, or Varsity. There are ample ("weekly" as one local AD told me) opportunities offered by schools in our area for all three levels. Each wrestler is allowed 15 weigh-ins each season. Here is **Clark/Willow Lake's wrestling meet schedule** as an example of what ours could look like as our program develops. I added a few observations to it.

- Coach - If we approve the start of wrestling, we can explore local options or consider adding wrestling coaching as an extra duty in a future teacher call. Starting the program will not be feasible without a coach.
- Co-oping - I do not believe that GPL should co-op with other schools as a way of offering programs that we are not able to offer by ourselves. Everything at GPL is Christian education, including our athletic program. Co-oping would limit our ability to do ministry through our athletic program.
- Financial impact - see above