

# MEET THE NEW STAFF

This year, 13 new teachers and staff members pepper the classrooms of Grant High School. This colorful mishmash of educators includes a member of the Timbers Army, a competitive ballroom dancer and several world travelers. They are ready to kick the year off and contribute to the needs of all Grant students. These are their stories.

Interviews by Madeline Metz  
Photos by Cassie Hill



TRACY WISHER

**Age:** 33  
**Hometown:** Cudahy, WI  
**Position:** Spanish teacher  
**Family:** Husband, Luke; daughter, Mirabella, 2  
**Before Grant:** Adjunct instructor at Portland State University  
**Guiding philosophy:** “I just really like working with younger people, seeing how much people can accomplish with little instruction.”

Wisher remembers walking through the streets of Italy and hearing music on every street corner. A professor encouraged her to study abroad and that spurred Wisher to become a teacher. Because of her love for Latin American culture, Wisher decided that teaching Spanish would fit her best.



KERI PILGRIM

**Age:** 36  
**Hometown:** San Jose, CA  
**Position:** Freshman biology, AP anatomy and physiology teacher  
**Family:** Parents in San Jose; and two sisters  
**Before Grant:** Science teacher at Central Catholic High School  
**Guiding philosophy:** “It really comes down to relationships for me. The more I know you as a person, the easier it is to have a conversation about science or school.”

When you visit tropical places like Costa Rica, you get to enjoy the scenery. When Pilgrim was there, she researched parasites. She also spent time in China and Brazil studying schistosomes. She is a competitive ballroom dancer and is the owner of a bearded dragon named Carol.



BRIAN HOBBS

**Age:** 45  
**Hometown:** Portland, OR  
**Position:** Special education instructor  
**Family:** Three Chihuahuas, Tina, Max and Rocky; and a beagle, Harley  
**Before Grant:** worked at the Pioneer Special School Program  
**Favorite movie:** Hollywood Canteen (“I’m an old movie buff”)  
**Guiding philosophy:** “I didn’t choose this job. It chose me.”

Hobbs got a master’s degree in general elementary education, but he found work in the special education field. His greatest passion in life is collecting and listening to music from the 1930s, 40s and 50s. Ask him about the King Sisters or the Andrews Sisters and Hobbs will go on forever.



## WESTIE FREEMAN

**Age:** 27

**Hometown:** Tampa Bay, FL

**Position:** Algebra teacher

**Family:** Henry, a Jack Russell-Chihuahua mix

**Before Grant:** Student taught at Arts & Communication Magnet Academy; part-time teacher at Grant last year

**What's on the nightstand:** *The Monsters of Templeton* by Lauren Groff

**Guiding philosophy:** "I like the eureka moments, when students who don't get it or think they are really bad at math suddenly understand. It's nice."

A self-professed "dork" who loves math, Freeman found that combining her love of numbers and young adults led to a career in teaching math at the high school level. Her name comes from a dog breed, the West Highland Terrier, a childhood pet. "I never have to worry about anyone in the street shouting my name and five people turn around," Freeman says. She loves that her name makes her unique. Freeman enjoys traveling, a lot. Last summer, she trekked all across Asia and has been to 11 countries in total.



## ELAINE NUSSBAUM

**Age:** 58

**Hometown:** Portland, OR

**Position:** Special education instructor

**Family:** Partner, David; three cats; and four chickens

**Before Grant:** Special education instructor at Wilson and Franklin

**What's on the nightstand:** Shakespeare, Jack Driscoll

**What's in the fridge:** Thai green curry

**Guiding philosophy:** "I like to find out the passions of the students and what they are interested in."

After working a number of dead-end jobs at camping stores, Nussbaum decided to put her bachelor of arts in social welfare from the University of Washington (where she was a student of the famous poet Allen Ginsberg) to work. She had always considered herself a teacher at heart, so she found a job at Franklin High School working in special education. She soon fell in love with the kids and the job. This year, she was transferred to Grant. Nussbaum is well traveled and has gone hiking in the mountainous regions of Nepal, which she found astounding.



## AMANDA JORDAN

**Age:** 28

**Hometown:** Somers Point, NJ

**Position:** Counselor

**Family:** Husband, Phil

**Before Grant:** Counseling Intern at Grant

**Favorite Author:** Gabriel Garcia Marquez

**What's in the fridge:** Pizza ("I am a pizza connoisseur")

**Guiding philosophy:** "Education is the greatest weapon to change the world."

Jordan first knew that she wanted to be a teacher when she studied abroad in South Africa and Argentina. That's when she became interested in social justice issues. A long way from her native New Jersey, she learned new ideals and found new perspectives. After visiting some of the shanty towns, she found that education was the best means to solve social issues. Last year, Jordan did an action research project at Grant where she found problems with the scheduling. She hopes to translate this investigative work ethic into creating real change as a Grant High counselor. She recently celebrated her first wedding anniversary.



## NINE DEJANVIER

**Age:** 33

**Hometown:** Portland, OR

**Position:** Sculpture and printmaking teacher

**Family:** Pablo, a five-year-old mini pinscher and dachshund mix

**Before Grant:** Taught yoga; student teacher at Wilson High School

**What's in the fridge:** Coconut milk

**What's on the nightstand:** *The Inner Sky* by Steven Forrest

**Guiding philosophy:** "I really love working with high school students. I think they are very interesting people and I wanted to do something in the world that was helpful to other people."

Dejanvier realized in high school that she would rather be behind the camera making films instead of starring in front of them. So in college, she got her degree in film and video. She has training as a personal development coach and works with people on emotional wellness. She has also taught yoga. She believes that art is a powerful way to help people express themselves creatively.



## MATTHEW MILES

**Age:** 31

**Hometown:** Chicago, IL

**Position:** Study hall monitor

**Family:** Parents live in Chicago and he has three siblings

**Before Grant:** Worked in a residential treatment center

**What's in the fridge:** Meat

**What's on the nightstand:** *East of Eden* by John Steinbeck

**Guiding philosophy:** "Seeing kids being able to better themselves or improve in some way or some thing is a very rewarding feeling."

For a long time, Miles wanted to be a doctor. But after realizing how much he loved working closely with people, there was nothing else he wanted to do more. Miles has worked in residential treatment and with special education programs for non-profit organizations. He was able to do things like take troubled kids backpacking in nature for the first time. He loves music (Led Zeppelin is one of his all time favorites), art, anything outdoors and good cheeseburgers. "I'm really liking Killer Burger these days. I'm a total carnivore."



## JESSICA MURRAY

**Age:** 34

**Hometown:** Scottsdale, AZ

**Position:** Hip-hop dance teacher

**Family:** Husband, Colin; son, Tristan, 4

**Before Grant:** Theater teacher at West Linn High School

**What's on the nightstand:** Urban fantasy books

**What's in the fridge:** Thai food

**Guiding philosophy:** "I want students to feel comfortable with themselves and gain a sense of expression."

A former dancer and actress, Murray has been honing her skills since the age of three. She loves dance because it gives young and old a chance to experience new things, feel comfortable with themselves, and gain confidence. After an undergraduate degree from Northern Arizona University and a master's from Portland State University, she brings her knowledge to Grant. She is the first dance teacher in more than 10 years. She still manages to have a theatrical career on the side. Last spring, she acted for a local theater company in Portland.



## MIRABAI REIMULLER

**Age:** 39  
**Hometown:** Santa Rosa, CA  
**Position:** French and Spanish teacher  
**Family:** Husband, Paul; daughter, Annalise, 3  
**Before Grant:** Taught at Peninsula, Roosevelt and Faubion  
**What's on the nightstand:** *Paris to the Moon* by Adam Gopnik  
**Guiding philosophy:** "I was very social, and I had sort of a natural leadership and a strong sense of justice early on."

Reimuller took French since middle school and lived in a chateau in France during her gap year before college. It wasn't until 2001 that she learned Spanish. She is now fluent and will be teaching both languages. Reimuller is busy these days painting her family's first house.



## DOUG MANDELL

**Age:** 37  
**Hometown:** Chicago, IL  
**Position:** Computer science teacher  
**Family:** Girlfriend, Claire; dog, Rosie, a Labradoodle  
**Before Grant:** Worked in IT for 10 years  
**What's in the fridge:** Deep dish Chicago-style pizza  
**What's on the nightstand:** *Olive Kitteridge* by Elizabeth Strout  
**Guiding philosophy:** "There are unlimited exploring possibilities with history."

Mandell wanted to be a teacher since he was 15 when he entered Anthony Smith's history class for the first time. His teacher made the class come alive. After working at Avinode, Inc., for 10 years, Mandell decided it was time to become a teacher. He is a member of the Timbers Army.



## JENNIFER XOCHIHUA

**Age:** 47  
**Hometown:** Portland, OR  
**Position:** Library assistant  
**Family:** Husband, Paul; daughters, Alexis, 18, and Taylor, 15  
**Before Grant:** Kindergarten aide  
**What's on the nightstand:** *Below* by Meg McKinlay.  
**Free time:** Loves baking and drinking peppermint mochas  
**Guiding philosophy:** "The kids here are constantly teaching me new things, and in turn, I hope to help and teach them, too."

Officially, Xochihua is now the new library assistant, but she has been an active volunteer at Grant for four years now. One of the many perks of working in the library has been helping students find a good book to read and seeing all the books she would like to read herself.



## MAGGIE NESBITT

**Age:** 63  
**Hometown:** Alplaus, NY  
**Position:** Special education instructor  
**Family:** Son, Edwin; and two grandchildren  
**Before Grant:** Taught special education at Jefferson  
**What's on the nightstand:** Mystery books, like *The Death of a Gentle Lady* by M.C. Beaton  
**Guiding philosophy:** "I only have one biological child, but I have so many children in my heart."

Two of the most important people in Nesbitt's life are her six- and seven-year-old grandchildren. That's why the highlight of her summer was spending time at the beach with them in an event called "GrandCamp." Nesbitt has worked in special education for more than 20 years.