

Gifts to Staff Members:

Recently, many of you may have seen reports in the media relative to the state conflict of interest law that governs the receipt of gifts by public employees.

This is receiving attention this year due to a new state law requiring all Massachusetts public employees to receive a copy of conflict of interest regulations and to receive mandatory training on this topic. While it is unlikely that teachers receiving tokens of appreciation from students and their families was the impetus for the state government's recent emphasis on conflict of interest legalities, it is important that our employees comply with their legal responsibilities. The purpose of the law and accompanying regulations is to avoid any perception that a public employee might display some type of favoritism due to the influence of a gift. While parents often give gifts to our teachers and aides at holiday time and/or the end of the year as an expression of gratitude for their hard work, I would appreciate it if parents who choose to do so would adhere the following guidelines in order to avoid putting our educators in an awkward position:

- Massachusetts General Law Chapter 268A and State Ethics Commission rules prohibit all public employees from receiving personal gifts of "substantial value," which according to the regulations is \$50 or more. This includes meals, tickets, services rendered, holiday gifts, etc.
- The Ethics Commission has recently ruled that the \$50 or more restriction applies even when a group of people pools their funds to contribute to a gift. Therefore, if multiple parents of students in the same class chip in to purchase a gift for the teacher, the teacher cannot accept it if it is worth \$50 or more.
- The law and regulations apply to any *single, personal* gift to a public employee from an individual or group. An employee may accept multiple gifts from different parties, as long as each individual gift complies with the regulations.

Contributions for educational supplies, the purchasing of books or curriculum materials for the classroom, or a donation to a PTO or organization such as the Natick Education Foundation in the educator's name are not subject to the limit.

Natick families traditionally have been generous to our educators, and all of us in the School Department appreciate all of the time, effort, and financial support that you provide. I ask that you please follow these guidelines so that our educators do not need to politely decline a gesture of appreciation. If you have questions about the law and regulations, please contact your principal or me. Thank you.

Peter Sanchioni, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools