



NMRSD Update

Friday, October 16, 2020

From the Administration

In addition to the tremendous challenges presented by the COVID virus, there is no question that the highly charged political climate in our country can have a significant impact on our students, our schools, and the educational process. Elections at the state and federal levels, as well as the complex issues related to racial injustice, can be very polarizing and often lead to heated discussions among educators, families, and students. Therefore, it is important that all of us adhere to the relevant policies and guidelines when approaching these topics, to foster thoughtful academic discourse, protect the rights of those involved, and ensure safe, inclusive learning environments.

As educators, we take very seriously our responsibility and legal obligation to educate students about the history and current events in the United States and the importance of civic engagement to our democracy. In a country of nearly 330 million people – with diverse backgrounds, religions, and political views – there will never be agreement on all issues. Our educational system is designed not to tell students what to think about issues but rather how to gather and examine information, think critically, engage with their peers, and draw informed conclusions.

At the same time, we know that many of us have strong opinions and deeply held beliefs of our own. When political issues arise in schools – particularly when students ask thoughtful questions – it can be challenging to set aside our individual perspectives and respond without bias. Some argue that even in school settings, students and adults are protected under the First Amendment to freedom of speech. However, that provision of the Constitution does not give individuals the right to voice any opinion, in any setting. The circumstances and context do matter, and in the case of schools, we have a legal and ethical responsibility to ensure that our viewpoints do not create division or disruption that would be harmful to students or staff. This year, in particular, with so many members of our community feeling the anxiety and strain of the COVID-19 pandemic, we must be more vigilant than ever about creating school cultures rooted in empathy and support rather than conflict and opposition.

With Election Day just three weeks away, it is important also to remind the entire community that the law prohibits any form of campaigning in schools or on school grounds. Furthermore, public employees are prohibited from engaging in any political advocacy on school grounds, during the school day, or using any school property or resources to campaign or raise funds for any candidate or referendum. This includes a prohibition on hanging signs endorsing a particular candidate or position on a ballot question. It is also not permissible for teachers or other staff members to advocate for any political candidate in class. When engaging students in discussion about politics, each of us must remain neutral about our own views while creating a constructive forum for students to explore and discuss the issues. Verbal or symbolic speech which results in disruption, disorder, or interference with instruction or professional activities is prohibited.

We recognize that in this political environment, the stakes are high, and many of us are deeply passionate about the issues at hand. In a community composed of people with different viewpoints, we will undoubtedly encounter neighbors and colleagues whose opinions may not only be different from ours, but may even seem offensive, prejudicial, and out of step with the values of our school community. As objectionable as these viewpoints may be, they do not negate our responsibility to maintain safe, civil learning environments focused on students' academic growth and social-emotional well-being.

If you have questions or concerns about these matters, please feel free to contact my office. I am truly grateful to the members of this community for demonstrating kindness, compassion, and decency during these incredibly challenging times.

Thank you

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Lyn Giancotti for her baking and delivery efforts. Lyn made every staff member in the district one of her famous personal-sized lemon cakes as a thank you for pushing through for our students during the pandemic.

Lyn is always willing to go above and beyond for NM and I know I am not alone in being thankful that she is such an important part of the NM Community!!!

Good News

At this week's conference call with Commissioner Riley, we learned that according to the physician from Massachusetts General Hospital, who is advising the Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, schools are not the "super-spreader"¹ of the virus that many thought they would be. In fact, there have been very *few* cases statewide that seem to have been transmitted at school. This is great news and it certainly appears that the

¹ [Schools Aren't Super-Spreaders, The Atlantic, October 9, 2020](#)

safety precautions and physical distancing guidelines that we have in place are working to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

That being said, we ask the community to remain vigilant at home, at youth sporting events, and with the approaching holiday season in adhering to the recommended safety measures. It is with your support that we will be able to continue to offer in-person learning.² Thank you for your support.

COVID-19 Dashboard

If you were not aware, Pepperell came in at a YELLOW rating this week. With the recent uptick in cases, rather than sending out communications on what could be a fairly regular basis, we are working on developing a dashboard to post on the district website so the current NMRSD numbers are easily tracked. We hope to have this in place early next week.

Like all regionals and in accordance with state guidance, NMRSD will make all decisions regarding additional measures required to deal with COVID-19 based on its member community with the highest population, which in our case is Pepperell.

Again, I remind everyone to do their part in helping with mask-wearing, physical distancing, and avoiding situations that could lead to the virus spreading.

DESE Update on Wind & Brass Instruments

In the Commissioner's weekly update, the Department has updated its Guidance for Courses Requiring Additional Safety Considerations for Fall 2020. When in-person school is occurring, wind and brass instruments may be used **indoors or outdoors** with 10 feet of distance between individuals. Masks, including instrument masks that have a slit for the instrument, and the use of bell covers are encouraged if possible.

NMRSD is requiring students who play wind and brass instruments to wear masks with slits and abide by the DESE guidance. Please speak to your child's teacher regarding specific questions.

Food Service

As I reported previously, the USDA has provided all families with breakfast and lunch, for at least the time being. While it is certainly a decision that will benefit many, the current lack of participation will come at a cost.

For all intents and purposes, we do not budget for food service because in a typical year the food service program is self-supporting. The state and federal reimbursements and profits (including sales from ala carte items) fund the program and pay for the staffing.

² [10-12-20 Update Regarding Survey Results and maintaining our current model](#)

However, in the current model, meals are provided free of charge, which means we are completely dependent on participation to receive the state and federal reimbursement. In addition, due to the COVID restrictions, there is no opportunity for students to purchase ala carte items. Unfortunately, without participation in the meal program, there is no reimbursement. This will ultimately lead to a budgetary issue. For our first two weeks alone, the district was short \$47K due to low participation.

I fully realize that the current meal requirements for the USDA can be a challenge, that said, I would appreciate any help in the form of student participation so that we can boost our funding, otherwise, the aforementioned loss will continue to build.

Please see the attached flyer.

Public Comment for School Committee

Due to the ongoing situation with regard to COVID-19 and the challenges that having public meetings present, we are going to make some changes to the Public Comment portion of school committee meetings.

For the foreseeable future, the public will still be able to join school committee meetings remotely; however, due to technical challenges, community members who would like to participate in public comment will be asked to do the following:

1. Email Brad Morgan at bmorgan@nmrsd.org by 5:00 pm the night of the meeting.
2. The email must include your Name, Address, and the Narrative that you would like read into the public comment portion of the meeting.
3. Brad Morgan will read your provided comment aloud so that it becomes a part of the meeting.

Please remember that school committee members will not respond to comments the night of the meeting, but may do so at a later date.

Superintendent Coffees

Our next meeting will be held on Tuesday, October 20th at 4:00 pm.

Please copy and paste this link into your browser:

For Video: meet.google.com/xyv-jucc-unn

For Phone: (US)+1 435-268-2189 PIN: 715 301 750#

Additional Tentative Dates:

Tuesday, November 17th	9 am
Tuesday, December 15th	4 pm
Tuesday, January 12th	9 am
Tuesday, February 9th	4 pm
Tuesday, March 9th	9 am
Tuesday, April 13th	4 pm
Tuesday, May 25th	9 am

Invitations will be sent out the day before the meeting. When possible, both the Assistant Superintendent and Director of Student Services will be in attendance. Please be sure to email me questions directly by 5 pm on Monday, October 19th. Where answering questions may often involve discussions with other district personnel, questions received after this point will likely not be answered.

Community Flyers

Friends of Lawrence Library Book Sale
Friends of Lawrence Library Zucchini Cookie Cook-a-Long