



# Superintendent's Newsletter

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Issue 11

Susan M. Gorky, Superintendent  
Nancy Spitulnik, Asst. Superintendent

## Superintendent's News



Dear Staff, Students, Families and Community Members,

Welcome back to school! On August 30<sup>th</sup> we opened our doors to grades 1-12 students. I hope you had a relaxing and enjoyable summer vacation filled with lifetime memories!

The 2011-2012 school year promises to be an exciting year for many reasons. I am especially pleased to announce that there are 225 students taking Advanced Placement (AP) courses this year at the High School compared to 46 last year. This is due to our improved Program of Studies and the Mass Math + Science Initiative, (MSSI) AP grant received by the High School. Congratulations to Northbridge Elementary School! The preschool and kindergarten programs have been accredited through the National Association for the Education for Young Children (NAEYC). NAEYC has developed 10 standards and over 400 criteria based on the latest research on the development and education of young children. Our preschool and kindergarten classrooms have met these standards and criteria and have received NAEYC Accreditation thanks to the hard work and dedication of our teachers and principal.

Our goal continues to be **High Expectations and Active Engagement for All Learners**. We are committed to and actively working on improving the achievement of all of our students through the formal implementation of Professional Learning Communities. Working in a Professional Learning Community (PLC) means, "Educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve. Professional learning communities operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous job-embedded learning for educators." *Learning by Doing (2010)* This year on September 2<sup>nd</sup>, all teachers were trained and discussed best practices in assessment, student feedback and intervention through PLC's. Discussion included prevailing questions such as: What are we supposed to teach? How do we prioritize and order our instruction?

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### Aug/Sept. Events

Sept 22	NES Open House
Sept 25	NMS Open House
Sept. 27	Balmer Open House
Oct. 7	PD Day—No School Students

**“Together... We Can”**

How do we know all students are learning? What do we do when students are not learning? What do we do when students have already mastered the skills we are teaching?

We acknowledge that there is work to be done to ensure our District is a high performing district. Working together we continue to make steady progress. The Northbridge Public Schools are committed to providing a rigorous and relevant educational program designed to challenge and support our students to achieve their personal best.

As a comprehensive educational institution, we believe that the students of Northbridge deserve nothing less than the very best academic offerings, safe and supportive learning environments, athletic and related arts opportunities, and an array of extracurricular programs.

We believe in supporting and challenging our students to reach their full potential and take great pleasure in recognizing our students for their efforts to achieve excellence. We are in the process of aligning our English Language Arts and Mathematics curriculum with the Common Core, advanced placement and honors courses are offered, and the promotion of high expectations and active engagement for all learners defines each level of our educational program.

We believe our students should be engaged learners, not only in the classroom, but also well beyond. Northbridge has a long tradition of supporting a broad range of athletic offerings, with many teams excelling in their respective divisions to playoff and championships levels, again speaking to our commitment to excellence. Our music program has grown by leaps and bounds! We are very proud of our students' achievement over a few short years.

The Northbridge Public Schools District is committed to excellence. We greatly appreciate the support of the Northbridge community and commit to continuing to earn that support. Parents are an essential ingredient to all students' success. We encourage each and every parent to be actively involved in their child's education. We need strong parent-teacher partnerships and ongoing communication to ensure that all of our students achieve at a high level.

Sincerely,

Susan M. Gorky  
Superintendent of Schools



***We can boost student achievement by expanding what is achievable!***

## NHS NEWS

Northbridge High School is excited for the start of the 2011-2012 academic year. We have had a very productive summer with several additions to the NHS staff and programming. We are pleased to announce the additions of Mr. Neil Polucha-Mathematics, Mr. Jeff Kozik-History and Ms. Danielle Donaruma-Art. These new faculty additions will be a wonderful benefit to our current student population and faculty. The entire Northbridge community welcomes them.

NHS has added extra Smartboards to our classrooms this summer to increase technology exposure to our students. We will also be utilizing our new Science/Engineering Center where new computers and a Smartboard will help us compete with area schools and offer a comprehensive and "cutting edge" experience for our pupils. The addition of new software will also allow us to provide a 21st Century learning experience for all of our students. The District Technology team has updated and replaced many computers at NHS this summer to ensure a smooth opening to the school year.

This year marks the first year we will be collaborating with the Massachusetts Math and Science Initiative(MMSI) to increase our Advanced Placement (AP) course offerings. This grant of \$155,000 was received in the spring of 2011, and will provide teacher training and student support throughout the year. We look forward to working with MMSI and seeing great results for our students next spring.

NHS faculty will continue to work in Professional Learning Communities (PLC's) throughout the year to collaboratively work together establishing goals for students, departments and raising student achievement. Assessments, MCAS data and AP progress will be monitored weekly with action plans designed to address any curriculum issues that may arise. NHS faculty will also continue to work towards maintaining NEASC accreditation and preparing for our 5-year report due in the spring of 2013.

Please visit our website at [www.nps.org](http://www.nps.org) to view all pertinent dates for athletics, Student Handbook, NHS Program of Studies and club information. Additionally, all parents/guardians are strongly urged to sign up for iParent. This program allows all parents to view their child's attendance, grades and daily academic progress reports in real time from a computer anywhere. Please stop by our Guidance office or Main office to get a personal password ASAP. It is that easy!

## CURRICULUM UPDATE

Dr. Nancy Spitulnik  
Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning

We have had a busy summer in the area of curriculum and learning for both students and teachers. Students attended a variety of summer school programs, as well as math and science summer camps. Teachers worked on aligning our curriculum with the new English Language Arts Common Core State Standards, attended exciting professional development courses and workshops, and developed new lessons and instructional materials through summer curriculum writing.

These efforts support our mission of continuous improvement for all learners. Staff will continue to advance their learning this year through further professional development and implementation of Professional Learning Communities (PLC's). A specific focus this year will be on using student data and progress monitoring to drive our educational programs. On September 2<sup>nd</sup>, Laurie Robinson, a nationally renowned trainer, worked with staff to enhance collaboration and discussions about standards-based curriculum, instructional decision-making, data-driven assessment practices, and effective feedback strategies. PLC teams will continue to work throughout the year to enhance the teaching and learning in all our classrooms.

However, as with everything in education, we need the support of parents in order to fully engage students in the learning process. Parents need to talk to their children about the work they're doing in school to extend student understanding of skills and concepts. This also makes parents aware of difficulties their children may be having in particular subjects. We urge parents to contact their child's teacher if there is a significant drop in grades or problems understanding the material. We are also working as a district to improve our communication to parents when we see students struggling in class.

We are looking forward to another productive year as we work to meet our district goal of "High Expectations and Active Engagement for All Learners."

## NHS SPORTS

All fall sports are up and running. The athletes and the coaches are hard at work in preparation for the upcoming season which opens up on 9/8 with the boys' soccer teams' first night contest vs. Leicester



## NORTHBRIDGE MIDDLE SCHOOL

The Middle School is ready for the 2011-2012 school year! The custodians and maintenance staff have done a wonderful job preparing the building and teachers have been in school preparing their classrooms – now all we need are the students!

We welcome back our sixth, seventh, and eighth graders and are looking forward to meeting the fifth graders and new students who will be joining our community. Interscholastic sports have begun for our seventh and eighth graders and our clubs will be starting shortly. Be sure to check out our new Club Brochure on the web site!

Save the Date! NMS will be hosting an Open House for the parents and guardians of our students on Thursday, September 15, 2011. The evening will begin at 5:45 PM with a presentation in the auditorium – *Common Core Standards in Mathematics – The Impact on the Curriculum at NMS*. Following the presentation, teachers will be available in their classrooms so that you can meet them and find out information about the content and expectations of each class. More details about the evening will follow – check the website!

Communication between home and school is very important to us – it is key to student success. Please check the website regularly for updates including announcements, the monthly newsletter and important dates. Teachers can be contacted through voice mail or email (a directory is posted on the web).

Lastly, we are pleased to welcome the following new staff members:

Ms. Keri Sullivan – Special Educator  
Mrs. Kayla DeWees – Adjustment Counselor  
Mr. Daniel Jones – Grade 8 Science  
Ms. Robyn Spain – Spanish Teacher

## PUPIL PERSONNEL SERVICES

Welcome back to another exciting school year. At the end of the year in May and June, the Department of Secondary and Elementary Education requested all districts participating in Special Education Indicator 8 to post the parent survey online so all parents in the district may participate in the survey. Indicator 8 looks at parent involvement in the district for students with disabilities. This year DESE took the opportunity to reach out to all parents in the community to learn about how the district partners with parents. The survey is broken into two parts; the first part is designed for all parents in the district and the second part is for parents of students with disabilities. The first half of the survey asks all parents to rate statements about how the school and parents work together in the school district. At the end of the general survey, there is a question that asks if you have a student with a disability. If so, the parent then continues with another section of the online survey which collects information for Indicator 8. The survey is anonymous.

Due to the lack of participation state-wide, DESE has extended the time for parents to respond to this online survey. The survey takes just a few minutes. The survey can be found on the Northbridge Public School website titled "DESE Invites Parents to Take a Survey." Please take a few minutes and complete the survey. This will provide our district with valuable feedback to improve our school community. DESE has extended the survey deadline through mid-September.

*Massachusetts Department of  
Elementary & Secondary Education*

## PTA

The Northbridge PTA is excited to announce its new website! The address to access the webpage is <http://northbridgepta.digitalpta.com>

Be sure to bookmark the site and check back often. PTA announcements, updates, membership information and more are available. It is the PTA's hope to 'go green' and become paperless through the use of its new page.





We hope that you had a relaxed, fun-filled summer. We'd like to extend a big welcome to all of our families as we begin an enriching and exciting new school year. The faculty at NES are excited to work with all families to foster a love for learning in each child. Children are more successful when parents are involved in their child's education and we welcome and encourage your participation! You are invited to contact myself or your child's teacher any time that you have a question concerning your child's progress.

We realize how important it is to be confident that your children are not only actively learning, but are also happy and safe. We can assure you that as a team at NES, we will do everything we can to provide that safe, happy and nurturing environment to make sure your child's year at Northbridge Elementary School is positively memorable!

Over the summer months, the preschool and kindergarten program successfully obtained accreditation from the **National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)**. NAEYC has ten standards for early childhood programs. These standards define what NAEYC—the world's largest organization of early childhood professionals—believes all early childhood programs should be. The over 300 criteria are included in: Relationships, Curriculum, Teaching, Assessment of Child Progress, Health, Teachers, Families, Community Relationships, Physical Environment, and Leadership and Management. The report will be shared during the September 6<sup>th</sup> School Committee Meeting.

While working within Professional Learning Communities, teachers have established and reached many strategic and measurable goals that have a direct impact on student achievement. Our professional goals this year include: align math and ELA curriculum to Common Core Standards, create and/or improve common assessments, ensure that the Bullying Prevention Plan related to School Committee policies is effectively implemented, and develop a school-wide plan for intervention and enrichment that is systematic and includes opportunities for proficient students to enrich their learning in ELA and mathematics. With these highlighted goals, it will be exciting to see what this school year will bring. Welcome back!

## BALMER

The Staff at Balmer School continuously strive to build a community of learners. We believe our community consists of staff, students, parents, and surrounding agencies and businesses. We will continue to advocate for the involvement of our entire community members in our school. Particularly, we strongly encourage parents to remain involved in their child's education. How can parents get involved? Show your children you are interested and concerned about their education. At home, take the time each day to talk to them about their experiences. Do not accept the typical response, "Oh, nothing happened at school today!" Ask them to teach you what they have learned that day. Your consistent interest in their progress will motivate them to learn.

ALL parents are welcomed to volunteer at Balmer School. Your presence in the school is vital to your child's education. Contact your child's teacher for volunteer opportunities. Also, be proactive by maintaining contact with your child's teacher from the beginning through the end of the year. Being proactive often prevents problems that may occur with little to no communication. Feel free to ask questions! Your child's teacher is committed to maintaining an open line of communication with you.

Check your child's agenda each night. The agenda is an important daily informational tool between the teacher and home. Let your child know that you are working together with the teacher and the school to help make their education successful in every way. So please come join our community of learners: we're willing to show you what we do and what we have to offer. When the home and the school are positively involved with one another, everyone is a winner.

Grandparent's/Special Person's Day will be held on Wednesday, October 5, 2011. All students may invite either grandparents and/or any special persons to a celebration at Balmer School. The celebration will begin at 9:30 and end at 10:50AM. This is a wonderful annual event designed to recognize some special members of the Balmer Community! We look forward to seeing all of our grandparents and special persons.

The Balmer School Open House will take place on Tuesday, September 27, 2011 from 6:00-8:00 pm. All parents and guardians are welcome to come to school to see your child's classroom and visit with your child's teacher. In addition, Mr. Zywiec, Mr. Incutto and Ms. Mallet (Balmer Adjustment Counselor) will be available to answer any questions or concerns you may have regarding Balmer School. We look forward to seeing you on September 27th!



## NORTHBRIDGE HIGH SCHOOL LINK CREW



*The 2011-2012 Link Crew Leaders with their coordinators Mr. Katz (Left) and Mr. Verdone (Right)*

You need to become the people who made you feel welcome two or three years ago," explained James Verdone, 3<sup>rd</sup> year High School Music teacher and Link Crew trainer, as he finished the second day of training for the 2011-2012 Link Leaders.

The Link Crew freshman transition program is now in its 3<sup>rd</sup> year at Northbridge High School.

### **What is Link Crew?**

Link Crew is a high school transition program that welcomes freshmen and makes them feel comfortable throughout the first year of their high school experience. Built on the belief that students can help students succeed, Link Crew trains members of the junior and senior classes to be Link Leaders. As positive role models, Link Leaders are motivators, leaders and teachers who guide the freshmen to discover what it takes to be successful during the transition to high school and help facilitate freshmen success.

## NORTHBRIDGE HIGH SCHOOL LINK CREW (cont'd)

More and more studies show that if students have a positive experience their first year in high school, their chance for success increases dramatically. The Link Crew high school program provides structure for freshmen to receive support and guidance from juniors and seniors who have been through the challenges that high school poses, and understand the transition to a larger school can sometimes be overwhelming.

Link Crew begins with a powerful orientation day that makes freshmen excited and proud to be attending their new high school and allows them to begin developing relationships and strategies that will contribute to their high school success.

After orientation, Link Crew continues providing a variety of both Academic and Social Follow Up Activities throughout the year. Academic Follow Ups are lessons presented by trained Link Leaders during visits to freshmen classes; Social Follow Ups are events organized by the Link team in which the freshmen and Leaders attend fun school sponsored social events together. Link Crew's goal is to provide schools with a structure in which students make real connections with each other. Through this program, students learn that people at school care about them and their success.

The Link Crew program has proven to increase attendance, decrease discipline referrals and improve academic performance.



*Dean of students John Susienka and Principal Mike Gauthier demonstrate their grill skills at the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual freshman orientation family cookout and open house.*



*Loretta White checks in cookout registrants while Dawn VandenAkker signs parents up for the IParent portal.*

## DISTRICT GOALS

To increase academic achievement with high expectations and active engagement for all students and staff.

To develop and secure a fiscally responsible budget that addresses the mission and beliefs of the district.

To improve the social and emotional climate in the district.

To strengthen the district's relationship with the Northbridge community.

To support the consistent review and implementation of school committee policy.

*The following are action items that will be clearly articulated in the Schools Improvement Plans, the District Professional Development Plan, the District Literacy Plan, and the District Improvement Plan. The aforementioned action plans will include objectives/goals, responsible parties, budget implications, and indicators of success.*

### **Goal 1: Academic Achievement**

To effectively differentiate instruction, challenge all students, and increase student achievement in all areas. The goals of differentiated instruction are to develop challenging and engaging tasks for each learner (from low-end learner to high-end learner). All teachers preschool through 8 should work to develop flexible groups in English Language Arts and Mathematics.

To develop a formative and summative assessment system for all content areas in addition to the MCAS. Teachers will use a variety of data indicators to document improved student achievement for all students

To further develop the co-teaching and inclusion model in all schools to make classrooms more inclusive and more appropriate learning environments for students with disabilities and other students who may need additional support for school success. Collaboration and service coordination in mainstream settings will enable students with disabilities to achieve greater academic and social success.

To seamlessly integrate technology across all classrooms in order to effectively prepare students for the 21st Century.

To effectively implement Professional Learning Communities (PLC) at all grade levels and content areas. The PLC's will set and achieve common goals that result in improved learning outcomes for all students. Student data and outcomes shall be the basis of PLC discussions and will be analyzed and disaggregated to develop Smart Goals and ensure measurable outcomes.

To continue to work towards each classroom and school grades preschool- 8 becoming Responsive Classrooms and Responsive Schools. (The Responsive Classroom approach is a widely used, research-backed approach to elementary education that increases academic achievement, decreases problem behaviors, improves social skills, and leads to more high-quality instruction.)

## DISTRICT GOALS (cont'd)

To enhance professional development opportunities for all staff and involve more staff in professional development opportunities beyond the school day and school year.

To vertically and horizontally align all curriculum areas to the Common Core Standards. The task force convened will continue to work on mathematics and literacy.

### **Goal II: Race to the Top Reform Areas 2011-2014**

Improve teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance

Ensure effective teachers and leaders in every classroom

Use data to inform instruction

Increase college and career readiness

Develop and implement the teaching and learning system

#### **RTTT Actions:**

Implement the state educator evaluation framework. (Design and implement an effective evaluation system for teachers and administrators aligned to the new state framework for educator evaluation.)

Align curriculum to the Massachusetts Common Core Standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics.

Strengthen climate, conditions and school culture: Use data and results from school surveys for decision making and change.

Strengthen skills of existing educators: Participate in National Institute for School Leadership (NISL) training for principals.

Create near-real-time access to data in the Education Data Warehouse by implementing the Schools Interoperability Framework (SIF). (SIF is a standard to support the transfer of data directly from our district to the ESE in near real-time. SIF will move districts from data compliance reporting to using data to inform decisions and using data to support continuous improvement.)

Access ESE-sponsored or approved professional development on using data to improve instruction

Implement one or more components of the statewide teaching and learning system. (ESE advisory committees will develop curriculum maps and units with curriculum embedded performance assessments (CEPAs), expand the existing digital library and develop a test builder engine to deliver formative and summative assessments in the core content areas. We will pilot one or more components of the statewide teaching and learning system when

## DISTRICT GOALS (cont'd)

### **Goal III: Fiscally Responsible Budget**

To develop District budgets based on potential variability in funding sources for FY 13.  
Continue to effectively communicate the needs of the district and be open and transparent to the public.

### **Goal IV: Social-Emotional Climate**

Continue to implement school/district student interventions based on staff and student input and work to develop responsive classrooms at all levels.

Research mentor or advisor/advisee program for middle school and high school students.

Continue to implement professional learning communities to empower staff and improve the educational climate.

Continue to implement bullying prevention programs and training throughout the District.

### **Goal V: Community Relationships**

Continue to promote varied opportunities for citizen involvement in the schools.

Continue involvement with the Town's Financial Planning Task Force and Charter Review Committee.

Communicate and celebrate successes through a variety of media.

Increase parental involvement across all schools.

Effectively utilize Channel 13.

### **Goal VI: School Committee**

Attend Selectman and Finance Committee meetings to provide updates and share the accomplishments of the schools and district.

School Committee will consistently meet with MASC and key stakeholders to update policies.

Ensure alignment between School Committee Policy and student/staff handbooks.

Ensure that School Committee procedures and protocols are published and understood, including yearly calendar of School Committee events.

Review the Superintendent's goals and accomplishment according to the established time lines.

Organize School Committee training through MASC or another organization, with the focus on School Committee involvement in the school administration and the definition of committee procedures and protocols.

Ensure review of District Goals and progress on the goals twice per year.

Discuss the development of a formal district and schools public relations plan.

Explore options for a school based health center.



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## For Community and School Information:

[www.northbridgetimes.com](http://www.northbridgetimes.com)  
[www.blackstonevalleytribune.com](http://www.blackstonevalleytribune.com)

**The Northbridge Public Schools now accept online payments!** Parents and community members can make payments for preschool tuition, athletic fees, activity/club fees, after school program fees, facility use/rental fees, credit recovery course payments, and school food service through a quick, convenient, and secure online payment center established by UniBank. Please visit our website [www.nps.org](http://www.nps.org) and click on the link on the left hand side "Online Payment Center". Complete each screen to process your online payment. Payment can be made by check or credit card.

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School & District News**



## Have a wonderful school year

*It is the policy of the Northbridge Public Schools not to be discriminate on the basis of race, gender, religion, national origin, color, homelessness, sexual orientation, age or disability in its educations programs, services, activities, or employment practices.*