



Superintendent's Newsletter

November, 2010
Issue 7

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

Superintendent's News



Letter from Superintendent Gorky Committed to Excellence!

Dear Parents and Community Members,

It's hard to believe that the first semester report cards go home November 15th. Please take time to celebrate your child's accomplishments and challenge him or her to achieve. Parent and teacher communication is an essential ingredient to student's and school's success. We need parents to actively engage in their child's education and participate in school related activities so that each and every parent is well informed. I often wonder what is important to Northbridge parents when I see limited participation at events such as our Parent Bullying Presentation, MCAS Presentation, PTA and School Council meetings, informational events and even the High School open house. If you have any suggestions or feedback, please email me at sgorky@nps.org. It takes teamwork, a shared vision and strong relationships between parents, teachers and administrators for students to be successful. We all want what is best for students!

Fall brings many rich and fun learning opportunities for our students. Family quality time can be spent in many different ways. Northbridge always has an athletic event whether it is community or school athletics. We are very fortunate to have so many RAMS fans! During the fall foliage season, New England has great spots for day trips. You never know what you'll discover when you hit the road and explore the Blackstone Valley in the fall. There are many farms for apple and pumpkin picking, corn mazes that will challenge you and wonderful festivals and events. My favorites are the smell of apple pie baking in the oven and a homemade bowl of chili after an exciting football game.

As your Superintendent of Schools my goals are numerous! You may view my goals at http://www.nps.org/Superintendent_Evaluation_Tool and the District goals at <http://www.nps.org/node/66>. On November 9th and November 23rd our principals will present their School Improvement Plans and academic year 2009-2010 accomplishments to the School Committee. The newly developed three year School Improvement Plans will be posted on each school's website. Visit our web pages at <http://www.nps.org/>. My sincere appreciation goes out to our School Council members! Many thanks to my leadership team and staff for their dedication and service to our students! We are certainly a district on the move.

Continued ➔

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Upcoming Events

Nov. 11 - No School
Veterans' Day
Nov. 12- No School
Professional Dev. Day
Nov. 17- Release Day
Parent Conferences
Nov. 24, 25, 26
Thanksgiving Break

My primary goals are to ensure that our schools are safe, that we all have high expectations and active engagement for **all** learners and to enhance the home-school-community relationship to which we are strongly committed.

Safe schools are schools that establish a school/community environment which is physically and emotionally safe, well disciplined, and conducive to learning. Schools need to be well prepared for immediate response to, and mitigation of the aftermath of a crisis, and work to prevent violence through education, zero tolerance and teaching students to make safe choices. I am pleased to report that we are advanced in all the aforementioned areas. We have a cohesive Emergency Protocol Plan, Bullying Prevention and Intervention Policy, and an actively engaged bullying task force. Fifty teachers have participated in the week long Responsive Classroom training. We have trained teachers and provided parents with bullying prevention workshops and will soon be providing our students with additional resources and programs. We work hand in hand with the Northbridge Police Department and participate in the District Attorney's Roundtable. The Northbridge Association of Churches is always available to support our students. Additionally, we have brought back adjustment counselors to all our schools.

High expectations and active engagement for **all** learners means that every student will reach his or her fullest potential in each and every classroom in the Northbridge Public Schools, and that all staff will work together to effectively differentiate instruction for all learners. In other words, all students will be provided with rigorous and relevant instruction that will afford them active and engaging learning experiences. We work hard so that our best and brightest students will be challenged to their fullest potential, our average students will be challenged to demonstrate achievement beyond proficient and our at risk learners will be encouraged to celebrate their success and achieve at high levels. We offer meaningful programs for all learners such as Virtual High School, Advanced Placement Courses, Middle School Algebra and World Language, elementary enrichment programs as well as Title I, co-teaching and inclusion opportunities.

Our work and our thinking on how to transform the Northbridge Public Schools to a high performing district where all students achieve at high levels and are actively engaged is influenced by contemporary educational researchers, Richard DuFour, Rebecca DuFour, Robert Eaker, Thomas Many and Mike Smooker who believe we learn best by doing. Through our work in Professional Learning Communities, leaders and teachers are identifying purposeful and focused actions that contribute to the goal of improved learning for students and staff alike. Our PLC members have been engaged in meaningful Smart Goal setting and data analysis, and are developing formative and summative assessments that will bring results now and in the future. I sincerely appreciate the work they have done during the professional development days and staff meeting time; I am quite impressed by their commitment and professionalism. However, the PLC journey is a process that will take time and for which there are no shortcuts.

The home-school-community relationship to which we are strongly committed continues to evolve as we develop relationships and communicate through a variety of venues and media. Our web is current and state of the art. We will continue to add pages, update information, and work actively to maintain a site in which the district can be proud. (Yes, we will continue to work towards Going Green so make sure the school secretary has entered your email address into our student management system.) All schools held open houses in the fall. The Special Education and Title I parent advisory councils continue to meet. We have an incredible elementary PTA and are looking for volunteers to begin a small Middle School PTA. The Leadership Team effectively communicates through newsletters and Connect Ed messages as well as individually and with small groups. The administration has worked with the School Committee, Town Manager and Selectmen to ensure 100% transparency regarding all fiscal matters. Our senior citizen luncheons have been a great hit.

Best wishes to everyone for a wonderful Thanksgiving. Enjoy time with your family and friends and take time to rejuvenate from the hectic lives we all lead.

Sincerely,



Susan M. Gorky
Superintendent of Schools

“Together...We Can”



Northbridge Elementary School Seeks NAEYC Accreditation

At the start of 2009 school year, Northbridge Elementary School staff began the NAEYC accreditation process for the preschool and kindergarten programs. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has developed ten standards for early childhood programs, which can help parents and families make the right choice when they are looking for a child care center, preschool, or kindergarten. These standards include: relationships, curriculum, teaching, assessment of child progress, health, teachers, families, community relationships, physical environment, and leadership and management. More than 400 related criteria are contained within these standards. To earn NAEYC Accreditation, programs must meet all ten standards by successfully performing at least 80 percent of the criteria related to each standard.

Obtaining accreditation is a 2-year process which contains 4 steps: 1) enrollment/self-study, 2) application/self-assessment, 3) candidacy, and 4) meeting/maintaining the standards. Through meaningful collaboration, data collection, and parent/community involvement the preschool and kindergarten staff will apply for candidacy this month with a site visit expected next spring. Seeking accreditation will ensure high quality programming for all students.

Northbridge Elementary School contains 4 preschool and 10 kindergarten classrooms. Our teamwork and strong communication provides on the job professional development for all involved to help us move our early childhood programs forward.

Technology News

Peter Ritter, District Instructional
Technology Specialist

It has been a busy beginning of the year working with faculty in every corner of the district on topics ranging from OpenOffice, web sites, interactive boards, Moodle, digital audio editing, digital photo editing, digital video, video conferencing, and much more! In my job as Instructional Technology Specialist I thrive on times where teachers get an "ah hah!" moment and see the clear potential of using technology in their classrooms. I've been getting a lot of those "ah hah!" moments so far this year, and only hope to see more! A menu of Instructional Technology PD opportunities will be available to teachers soon, and I hope many more "ah hah!" moments come from them.



Whitinsville Golf Club Supports Families at Northbridge Elementary School 50/50 Raffle held Oct 2, 2010

On October 2, 2010 the members of Whitinsville Golf Club organized a 50/50 raffle to benefit the students of Northbridge Elementary School. Whitinsville Golf Club members and guests were invited to participate in a raffle at 2 holes of the 18-hole course. Participants paid a \$5.00 fee and if their shot off the tee landed on the green, a raffle ticket was issued to them for a chance to win 50% of the till. In addition, many members, along with the Whitinsville Golf Club staff, made personal donations to the school which totaled \$1,030. This donation will be used during the holiday season to purchase winter clothing, grocery gift cards, and age-appropriate toys for Northbridge Elementary School families in need.



Making Math Make Sense

By Alison Wells, Middle School Math Facilitator

Math makes sense. This is my core belief and something I have worked very hard in my career to translate to students. Reflect for a moment on the math classes of your youth. If you are like me, those classes likely involved memorization of rules and procedures and loads of drill and practice. This approach was beneficial in one way: you still remember it. Over the last 20 years, many questions have been raised about whether this is the best approach. It has proven to result in procedural mastery, but do our students understand math concepts or are they simply repeating our rules?

To illustrate the difference between knowledge of concepts and procedural knowledge, I'd like to tell you about my baking ability. I am a procedural baker, and many of you may identify with me. I can follow the steps in a recipe perfectly. However, if I am short one ingredient, or the batter looks too dry, or there's a water stain on my note card, I freeze. I only know enough about baking to read and follow steps, I can't improvise, problem-solve, or estimate. Contrast this with the Martha Stewarts of the world. We all know them, maybe you're one of them. Martha is a conceptual baker. She can follow a recipe, but she also understands why certain ingredients are part of the recipe and others are not. She's aware of the relationship between butter and egg whites or the difference between baking powder and baking soda. With her knowledge of procedures *and* concepts, she can adjust, improve or create new recipes from scratch.

Math students with a procedural understanding can follow the rules and procedures for straightforward types of problems. They find it difficult, however to problem-solve when a more difficult element is thrown in. They know the rules but they don't understand the relationships and concepts that the rule is derived from. These students freeze up or make "silly mistakes" in the face of more challenging problems. Math students who also understand the concepts are equally as proficient at following the rules and procedures. They also know enough about why the procedures exist to be able to problem-solve and are confident applying skills in new and unfamiliar situations.

Whether a student develops procedural knowledge alone or also develops an understanding of concepts is entirely a result of the curriculum and the specific support a child receives from teachers and parents. The primary method for developing an understanding of concepts and relationships in math is discussion and reflection. Children must be given an opportunity to make hypotheses, discuss and debate their ideas, and reflect on what they learned or are still confused about. We are moving towards providing these opportunities for students regularly at the Middle School. I've included several ideas for how you can help support their development at home as well:

- **Ask questions.** You likely already look at your child's homework. Next time you do, ask open ended questions about their work such as, "why did you do this here?" or "how did you know you could change this number?" It's not important that you know the answers to these questions. It is more important that your child be given an opportunity to reflect verbally on the choices they made and why they made them. It can help a child realize where they may have gone wrong, or reinforce the understanding they have about the problem.
- **Let them struggle.** Believe it or not, struggling with a challenging problem can lead to a greater understanding of the concept. Feeling some discomfort is natural when experiencing a new situation or a new problem. Remind them that a solution is possible, it may not be *the* solution or the *right* solution, but a solution that makes sense to them is possible if they keep at it. This is a fine line for parents to walk; students need to feel a little uncomfortable during a challenging problem, but you need to be mindful of your individual child's tolerance for frustration and have them take a break if emotions are starting to take over.
- **Show them that math is all around us.** We've all heard it before but it is in fact true, math is everywhere. Number relationships exist outside of the math classroom. Have your child calculate the tip the next time you go out to eat. Bake cookies with your child and talk to them about the fractional amounts on the side of a measuring cup. Compare liters, gallons and quarts on your next trip through the dairy aisle. The possibilities are endless for ways that you can inspire and encourage your child at home.

We are working with you to develop students who are proficient with the necessary procedures in math but who are also comfortable applying them in new and unfamiliar contexts. Conceptual knowledge enhances, not detracts, from students' mastery of the standards, and complete mastery of the standards is our goal. I hope you are as excited as I am about the improvements we're making. Our students will soar to new heights this year and leave for summer break prepared for, excited and confident about what's coming next.

Co-Teaching Practices at Northbridge Middle School and Northbridge High School

Cathy Stanton, Director of Pupil Personnel Services

Consistent with the theme of High Expectations for All Learners, the Northbridge School District has developed a model to increase the participation of students with special needs at the middle and high school levels in the general education setting. Through the ARRA grant, the Department of Pupil Personnel Services hired a consultant, Donna Simone, to assess the special education inclusion services at the Northbridge Middle School and the Northbridge High School. Donna Simone was the former Special Education Director for Shrewsbury Public Schools and has been a special education consultant for over 15 years who specializes in helping schools develop best practices in special education.

Through teacher interviews, principal interviews, and observations of general and special education settings, the program evaluation indicated teachers and administrators have a strong commitment to students with special needs. Overall there is a strong desire for special education teachers and general education teachers to work together with students. Given the level of desire to work together for the good of students, recommendations were made to move towards a co-teaching model where a special education teacher teaches the content class with the general education teacher. This effort increases the number of students with special needs in the general education setting. All students benefit from language rich, content learning that occurs in the general education settings.

Co-teaching teacher teams and administrators were trained last May in a professional development day called Co-Teaching Practices, which introduced the various models of co-teaching, provided teachers with a clear plan, and complimented the District's ongoing initiatives. The principals worked with the schedules to provide co-teaching teams with a period per week of co-planning time. Co-planning time provides an opportunity to understand what the content topics will be, with opportunities for accommodations and modifications to be made to materials. Teachers had opportunities to work together before the start of the school year to begin planning for the year. Through the co-teaching model the number of substantially separate classes has been reduced, enabling students with special needs to successfully participate in the general education classes.

Bullying Prevention Update

Dr. Nancy Spitulnik, Assistant Superintendent

Much has been happening this year as we continue to work with students, staff, and parents to develop our bullying prevention program. On September 30th, Stephanie Fuchs, from the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center, gave a presentation on Bullying and Cyberbullying: Information for Parents. This program highlighted the increasing incidents of bullying among students, and the importance of empowering students and adults to take a stand against any forms of bullying. Stephanie's presentation is posted on the district website (www.nps.org) under District -> Parent Resources.

We have also posted other bullying prevention resources under Parent Resources. These include a listing of websites with comprehensive information on protecting your child from bullying, supporting your child if they are being bullied, and responding to cyberbullying. Parents are urged to report problems with bullying to the school principal. The Bullying Incident Report Form is also posted under Parent Resources.

Each of our schools has been working diligently to enforce our zero-tolerance policy on bullying. Staff understand their responsibility under the new state law to report all bullying incidents to school administration. These incidents are being investigated, and appropriate consequences given. Our school bus drivers were recently trained to better identify bullying problems, respond to them appropriately, and report them to school administration as required by law.

Over the next few months, we will be initiating student wellness presentations at Balmer, the middle school, and the high school that focus appropriately on issues such as bullying, drug and alcohol abuse, and personal safety.

Speaking of student wellness, an upcoming conference for parents on Stress and Your Teen/Pre-teen is being presented by the Milford Regional Medical Center on November 13th at Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical School in Upton. More information is available at http://yourteen.org/conference_flyer.pdf, or call 508-422-2838.

Our school district is working hard to provide, not only a high-quality academic program, but also a safe, supportive school environment where students can learn and grow as well-adjusted individuals.



Financial Planning Task Force

By Michael LeBrasseur
School Committee Member

In June, the Northbridge Board of Selectmen established a Fiscal Planning Task Force made up of members of various town boards and residents. The task force was created to foster a collaborative effort among all town officials and departments for the Fiscal 2012 budget process, as well as to ensure that the voters of Northbridge had the most accurate and complete information available to them in financial matters of the town.

The task force is made up of two members each of the Selectmen (Jay Athanas and Tom Melia), the School Committee (Mike LeBrasseur and Diane Mimmo), the Finance Committee (Sal D'Amato and Plato Adams), Town Manager Ted Kozak, and two citizens appointed by the Board of Selectmen (Alicia Cannon and Philip Simmons).

After the task force's first meeting in September, Chair Mike LeBrasseur and Vice Chair Alicia Cannon presented the plans and objectives of the body to the Selectmen. The task force aims to provide better insight to town officials and citizens to improve the decision making process for financial and resource allocations, and has identified the following objectives:

- Address short-term fiscal situation for FY12/FY13
- Create 3 year forecast for the town
- Identify financial issues and root causes
- Prioritize key issues/initiatives/projects facing the town in the next 3-5 years
- Improve accessibility of town financial information

The task force plans to create a communication plan, identify all town revenue sources, review department budget realities and gaps/concerns, develop a list of peer communities to see how Northbridge ranks among peers, and consider all options for improving operational efficiency.

The goal for a final report to the Board of Selectmen has been established as early February.



We are pleased to introduce you to the Northbridge Friends of Music, a non-profit organization formed to support all K-12 music students in the Northbridge Public Schools. Our members include the students, parents, faculty, and other community members. Last year, our first year, through many fundraising activities, our organization provided revenue that supported music programs/activities, as well as competitive performances. In addition, we assisted the music teachers in acquiring items not funded by the music budget. Our general meetings are held on the second Monday of each month in the High School Music Room from 7p.m. – 8 p.m. If you are interested in joining us or have any questions, please email us at northbridgefriendsofmusic@gmail.com

W.E. Balmer Elementary



Balmer -International Field Day



Ms. Labrie – Grade 2 Morning Meeting

Northbridge Elementary

Miss Baldwin's Grade K



Rockin' Character Ed Show After School



Middle School



Delanie Baldwin Grade 5



Theresa Sacs Grade 6



Celia Slater Grade 7



*Alish Wadden
Grade 7 Science class*



*Chris Dec & Chris
Gonynor, The First Lego
League Members.*



Savannah Haverty Grade 8



*Mrs. Gogolinski's Grade 6 class,
Gavin Dingus, Meghan Ferraro
and Mandy Green were working
on digital images with a photo
editing program.*



*Mrs. Rheume's class with Jared
Nigro and the Grade 7 science
class students view their own cheek
cells under the microscope during
their study of animals' cells.*

Middle School Spanish Program

It is amazing to walk into the Spanish classrooms and hear the conversations between students! Those participating have demonstrated a lot of natural ability for the Spanish language. Many of the students have amazing pronunciation and the potential of learning Spanish as a second language. So far this year the students have learned greetings, numbers, time and the mechanics that make the Spanish language work. The students are doing a great job and have a positive attitude in the classroom, which is translating to very good grades, but more importantly, they have shown an honest interest and respect for the Latin American culture.



ARAMARK Education, your food services partner, would like to thank the Northbridge community for their warm and supportive welcome. We are making changes to your child's menu that will introduce him or her to healthier choices, a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains in the breads, pizza crusts and pastas, as well as new and different dishes from around the world. Breakfast is an important part of any youngster's day. Please know that we serve an inexpensive, quick-take breakfast at all the schools.

Try our "Grab & Go Breakfast" at Middle, Balmer and NES. The student may go to the cafeteria and pick up a breakfast on their way to class. It's a great to start the day with breakfast! Check with your school for exact times.

The cost is \$1.50 per child; we offer \$.30 reduced price and free breakfast for students who qualify. Breakfast includes choice of milk, juice, or fruit, plus the entree of the day: cereal, warm muffin, bagel w/ cream cheese, assorted danish, or breakfast sandwich. It is quick, wholesome, and meets the nutritional requirements for each child's morning meal.

We hope you will choose the dining options available at your child's school, knowing they are being critically cared for by a dedicated team of professionals. Thank you again for your interest.

Robert Palmieri
Director of Food Services



Northbridge Field House Open to Community Members Monday, November 15, 2010

The Northbridge Public Schools and Northbridge High School are proud to announce public access to Veteran's Memorial Field House for walking or jogging exercises in the early morning starting Monday, November 15th. The Field House will be open from 6:00 a.m. until 7:00 a.m. on Monday-Friday for Northbridge citizens who are 21 years of age and older and who choose to walk or jog the track in lieu of walking/jogging outside in the cold or inclement weather. The Northbridge Field House is open to Northbridge community members only.

All community members must sign in and out of the Field House. The Field House will be closed promptly at 7:00 a.m. Please note that visitors are not allowed in any areas of the high school other than the Field House. The weight room or the cardio equipment are not open to the public. Access is strictly limited to the Field House. **The entrance on the east side of the Field House will be open—not the front door of the high school.** The Field House will not be open during school vacations, holidays, snow days or when the opening of school is delayed.

If you have any further questions, feel free to contact Principal Gauthier at mpgauthier@nps.org or Superintendent Gorky at sgorky@nps.org.

John and Abigail Adams Scholarship



Northbridge High School is proud to announce the Class of 2011 John and Abigail Adams Scholarship recipients. The Adams Scholarship provides a tuition waiver to a Massachusetts State College and University. These students qualified for the Scholarship by having superior Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) scores. Northbridge High School has an impressive thirty-eight (38) students receiving the Scholarship. These students were awarded the Scholarship notification at a Class of 2010 assembly. The recipients also received a letter from the Massachusetts Secretary of Education, Mr. Paul Reville, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, Mitchell Chester and Commissioner of Higher Education, Dr. Richard Freeland.

All students at Northbridge High School strive for high academic achievement supported by a highly qualified and dedicated faculty. NHS will continue its proud tradition of academic excellence in the days and years to come. Congratulations to the class of 2010 John and Abigail Adams Scholarship winners!

*Nicholas Abraham
Michael Barkin
Samuel Bergen
Hannah Bond
Kingsley Bradley
Ryan Capistran
James Carlise
Linda Carlise
Rachel Clasby
Adrian Fontes
Robert Fredette
Ryan Gove*

*Andrew Haas
Courtney Hale
Tiffany Hall
Justin Harpin
Nicholas Hull
Matthew Kane
Matthew Litchfield
Gregory O'Donnell
Shanise Perez
Sarah Phelan
John Pierce
Jordan Pimentel
Erin McIntyre*

*Thomas Murphy
Andrew Rabaioli
Matthew Rice
Joshua Rose
Cortney Rosenlund
Jennifer Roy
Brady Simmons
Bryce Simonds
Kaila Todd
Brita Turner
Haley Young
Merissa Zaltzberg
Katelyn Zuidema*



Congratulations!



Chemistry

Northbridge High School successfully submitted our 2-year progress report to the New England Association of School and Colleges (NEASC) on October 1, 2010. This progress report is a status update to NEASC informing them of our progress on recommendations forwarded to us after NEASC awarded NHS with a 10 year-accreditation status in 2007. NHS faculty will continue to work collaboratively with NEASC to address these recommendations during our Professional Learning Communities. Faculty will be discussing issues ranging from Advanced Placement Courses and Community Relations to Student Achievement and school-wide rubrics. NHS looks forward to finalizing our 5-year report which will be submitted to NEASC in 2012.

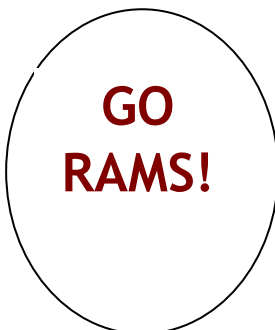


Northbridge High School NEASC Accreditation update



City Project

High School Sports



Both boys and girls soccer have qualified for the District Playoffs.

Boys soccer is currently the top team in the SWCL-East

Girls cross country is 8-1 and ranked by the T&G at #7 in Central Mass. Julie Ricker who is undefeated, won the league meet on Friday, 10/29/10.

Football is having another fine season at 7-1 and will also make the post season.

Field hockey and boys cross country worked hard this year. Neither will qualify for post season play but, we salute their fine accomplishments.

Golf has completed its season. They qualified for districts and finished 3rd at the league match.

Jordan Pimental was a first team all-star and Alex Cone a 2nd team all-star.

For Community and School Information:

www.northbridgetimes.com

www.blackstonevalleytribune.com

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ONLINE PAYMENTS!

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 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.

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.