Safety Update and Enhanced Lockdown Procedures
by Superintendent Nancy Spitulnik

Our district has been working to improve and enhance the safety and security of our school buildings and our safety procedures. District and school safety teams met last year to review and upgrade our security procedures in areas such as updating visitor entrance and identification procedures, access to school classrooms, and school emergency communications. These teams also identified other safety items that were approved at Town Meeting last Spring. These items included more security cameras for inside the building, improved classroom door locks, and window security film. The purchase of a key code access system for each of the schools was also approved, which we are installing now. Once this system is in place, we will be able to keep all unsupervised school doors locked for greater security.

We have also reviewed and updated our school lockdown procedures. As you may know, the thinking around the use of passive lockdowns, with students and staff huddling quietly in a corner of the room, has changed dramatically since the recent school shootings. Research has shown that a more active approach, with students and staff barricading doors, escaping to safety, and, as a last resort, confronting the shooter, has the potential to save many lives. As part of our safety team work, we have now revised our secure lockdown procedure to conform to these new standards. The Enhanced Lockdown Procedure for Active Shooters which details this new approach replaces our previous lockdown procedure. Some of the important differences include:

- The previous passive lockdown procedure provided one set of directions for all staff and students to follow, regardless of the situation or what seemed to make the most sense. With the new Enhanced Lockdown Procedure, there is no one right way to respond to an Active Shooter incident. Staff are trained to consider a range of responses, and “given permission” to assess what is happening and respond based on their best judgment of the situation.

- Staff are trained to actively secure their room against the intruder by barricading and/or tying down the door using whatever is available in order to keep the shooter out of the classroom.

- A key piece of the new procedure is active, ongoing communication to provide information on the shooter’s location and actions. This gives staff the opportunity to respond more appropriately, including escaping from the building if the shooter is known to be in a different location.

- As a last resort, staff are trained to confront, counter, and distract the shooter by throwing objects, running away, and/or attacking the shooter.

An important component of this new procedure is obviously staff training. Working with the Northbridge Police Department, we provided active training for school and district administrators and teacher leaders during the summer. All staff, including secretaries, instructional assistants, custodians, kitchen staff, and available substitute teachers, were trained during the afternoon of the first professional development day in September. This training will continue this Fall at each of the schools. Schools will also
do announced drills with the police department in the next few weeks to provide practice for staff, and familiarize students with the new procedures in an age appropriate way.

We will presenting more information on the new Enhanced Lockdown Procedures at the District Information Night on October 24th. See the flyer in this newsletter for more information.

I appreciate the dedication and commitment of the school and district safety teams, the Northbridge Police and Fire Departments, and all the Northbridge staff, who continue to work hard to ensure a safe and secure learning environment for all our students.