

To: NPS All Faculty and Staff
Date: August 22, 2023
Subject: Welcome Back Colleagues!

Dear Colleagues,

Welcome Back! It's the Friday night of summer, so-to-speak....the pace of email and interactions starts to tick up this week, and as a teacher, I remember feeling excited to meet my new team of kids but also sad that the change of pace summer affords was about to end!

Personally, I took two long-weekends for just a bit of time away. My husband (Zeff) and I did one long motorcycle ride to the Canadian border through Maine and it was awesome! Also, I am feeling a bit nostalgic, as my youngest, Ava, rises to her senior year of high school. We just completed her senior pictures and then dropped my son, Ethan, at college where he's a PharmD major. Where does the time go? We also had many good weekends with all of our kids (Ethan, Ava and Mick), our daughter-in-law (Elsbeth), and our grandson Mickey (grade 2). (*I have attached a few photos of the fun!*)

Beyond family time, **I prioritized getting the chance to learn as much about Newton and Newton Schools as I could before school began. I've attended 26 Newton family barbeques/meet-and-greets and counting!** Honestly, I feel rejuvenated and energized through my integration into the Newton community. **Last year was the hardest of my career—probably because I thought we were “out of” the pandemic.**

Did you have that kind of year, too?

I want to acknowledge that I am (we are) still discovering the ways the pandemic has “hit” us—from physical, to mental, to passion and to questioning ourselves and our profession. Coming here and meeting all of you has inspired me. My passion and resolve to do whatever it takes to support our profession is back.

We work in an amazing place! How do I know?

It has been wonderful **meeting over 137 staff members this summer (so far)** and beginning to get into the rhythm of summer planning and professional development offerings in Newton. It's been a hard stretch for educators, including educators in Newton, and I want to acknowledge that I have heard that from all of you. I know you hope this year will be restorative and inspiring, individually, and that you also hope the respect due to the education profession as a whole is restored.

Beyond hope—you can count on me to do the following for the profession and our district:

1. Work actively toward acknowledging what we have been through.
2. Honor the history and traditions of the district.
3. Push us to develop the next version of ourselves.

The Learning Continues:

Below are just a few of the things you can expect from me in the coming months as I continue to learn about district operations and meet more of you.

- **Days in residence at each school** to see you in action and the routines and operations of the building (so if you want to find me you know when I'll be at your school). These days will be published soon.
- **Weekly, more informal instructional visits** at school buildings.
- The creation of **student, staff and parent advisory groups to the superintendent** ([Click here to sign up for the Staff advisory to the superintendent](#)). These 1x per month meetings will help me stay informed about the district experience from the staff perspective.
- **Creation of an internal newsletter for staff**, condensing important information from Human Resources, Teaching and Learning, Elementary and Secondary Education, Student Services, IT, and DEI into one, clear, and succinct weekly round up.
- **Continued meet-and-greet options** with community and school groups.
- **Continuing the listening and learning tour** to hear more perspectives and unearth trends and themes within the district.
- **A public sharing of my learning to date** in late fall.
- **Working hard to settle fair, sustainable contracts that support our educators and our work with students and Newton's families.**

I am truly excited to meet you all as colleagues and accomplish amazing things in Newton together.

So, in a normal year, this is where this memo would end, and I'd invite you to our opening day. However, we are in a different year and some tense situations are before us. I write now on topics related to our contract negotiations and the start of school.

As I shared with you in a summer note in July, our current situation related to contract negotiations is one that is completely new to me. So I find myself in what I feel is a weird pickle about the start of school. **I just decided to share this pickle so everyone understands the why behind it and the impacts of it.**

The Pickle

Legal advice on all sides of contract negotiation issues are often conflicting and may appear to pit the School Committee and administration against school staff.

For example, there are differing understandings of what "work to rule" and "work stoppages" are in our district. Our union representatives are doing what is asked of them by asking principals to cancel events like open house or "sneak peek days." They are also providing guidance about what to let go of in prepping for our young people's arrival.

At the same time, it has been made clear to me in my learning from other districts in similar situations that if our principals cancel anything, we run the risk of creating a "lockout." A "lock out" is when administrators create conditions where staff cannot do their jobs in the fashion they always have, and we cut off the ability for a teacher/staff member to make his/her/their own decisions about how to proceed when conducting their professional lives.

So, here is the pickle. In that swirl of information and varied perspectives, I have to open school and provide the same opportunities for students that they have had in any other year in Newton. While I have never had to direct in this fashion, I have to do some directing now to ensure clarity for our staff, families, and students.

To quote Brene Brown: "*Clear is kind.*"

Back-to-School Events and Preparation Clarifications

- Staff are directed during the contractual work day, to work as Newton staff has worked in prior years. Newton teachers are directed to uphold the same work routines and provide the same experiences that have existed in prior years—welcoming students and interacting with members of the community who care for children and visit schools.
- Schools and grades who have had a tradition of “sneak peak days” in the past will be expected and directed to have “sneak peak days” this year as well.
- Classroom preparation and set up that allows for a safe, orderly and welcoming return to school is required and staff are directed to keep the same routines they have kept in the district for decades.
- If you have accepted appointment to a stipended job, curriculum writing, or some other paid activity, this work is part of the job that you accepted and agreed to perform and you are directed to follow through on that paid activity for which you have already been contracted.
- Staff are directed, as they have always done, to attend Back-to-School nights (open house/curriculum nights) and to work to ease student transition difficulties, as they have done every year.
- It is expected that staff attend our opening day convocation at Newton South High School. Breakfast will be served prior, but only attendance at the convocation is expected. In the future, trainings and professional development germane to our district’s vision and strategic plan of the future will be a part of this day.

For this year, given our current climate and the difficulties on all of us as we open school in this tense time, **we will have inspirational speakers who will honor and inspire Newton educators. I have invited educational leaders, parents, and students who have been positively impacted by your work.** There has not been enough celebration of educator work in recent years and you need to hear as many times as possible about your legacy and the importance of your work.

Indeed, it will be a rally about Newton Educator Excellence—because you make a huge difference in the lives of students and to each other and the community. It is a chance to focus on that excellence, celebrate it, and amplify it.

The day is intended to kick off our year together in a positive way and get you back to your buildings to get ready! I know there is always so much to do in the first days so I thank you, in advance, for all of these efforts.

Elementary Literacy Clarifications

- General education, special education, ELL educators and literacy specialists assigned to Grades 1, 2 and K are directed to participate meaningfully in professional development being provided during the work day for EL curriculum (this is scheduled for the week of September 11). Implementation of this expected curriculum is mandated in these grade levels. We will gladly satisfy any impact bargaining obligations that may still exist associated with aspects of implementation.

Out of respect for our staff, we have moved staff trainings out of summer hours and into contract work hours to avoid conflicts in this transitional time. It is important to

say again that curriculum is not the teaching. All staff have been teaching reading prior to this moment—that expertise remains within you as we move to this new resource, which many of you have indicated was a much needed addition to your work. Transition to this new resource will take time and expectations are to get started—there is no such thing as “perfect” when using new curriculum materials.

- Staff who have previously implemented EL curriculum in last year’s pilot are directed to implement the new reading curriculum.
- Principals may further direct additional staff to implement the new curriculum based on the grade level’s needs of their individual elementary schools—for example: if a whole grade level team is new to the district, it is kind to train them on the new curriculum and not the old one simply to train them again in a subsequent year.

Opening Day Convocation - Wednesday, August 30, 2023 - 8:30 a.m.

Our Opening Day event will begin at 8:30 a.m. on Wednesday, August 30, 2023 in the **Newton South Field House**. As this is a workday, attendance is expected by the start of the Opening Day program at 8:30 a.m. If you are unable to be there for emergency or exceptional reasons, please notify your principal of your absence. **A light breakfast will be served beginning at 7:45 a.m.** and I hope you will join me and your colleagues for an informal gathering before the program begins. It’s the one time we can be together as a school community and I’d love the chance to introduce myself to you.

I am thrilled that **MA Secretary of Education Patrick Tutwiler will join us on our opening day**. Secretary Tutwiler is a former MA teacher and leader (history teacher, Boston; principal Wayland; deputy and superintendent, Lynn). He seeks to support staff like you who have experienced trauma while educating through the pandemic. His **Stabilize, Inspire, Transform** vision serves to help us all envision the future of our profession. Also joining us will be **Regina Robinson, DESE Deputy Commissioner and Darcy Fernandes, DESE Director of Innovation**.

We will also hear from Newton North alumni, Kahlel Pritchard, about the impact his experience in the Newton Public Schools had on life beyond NPS. Cole Morris, 8th grader at Day Middle School, will share the impact an NPS teacher had on his current school experience. In addition to student stories, we will be treated to delightful student musical performances.

Once again, we will collect donations for the Newton Food Pantry (*see attached opening day agenda and flier for details*).

I hope you can see from this lineup that Newton is a world-class school district whose greatness, due to your hard work, is evident to all. We look forward to celebrating you, kicking off the school year, and working hard on the next version of Newton Public Schools together.

I hope your summer was filled with rest and activities of your choosing. I look forward to visiting you in your schools soon.

In collaboration and care,
Anna

Anna P. Nolin, Ed. D.
Superintendent of Schools