



Office of the Superintendent

To: Newton School Committee  
From: Anna Nolin, Superintendent  
Re: Superintendent's Update 12/18/23

### **EL Curriculum Update**

**Please listen to [Lev Smirnov grade 4](#)** (90 sec), Memorial-Spaulling, and his poetry reading and artist's statement.

Poetry celebration in Carol Cameron's fourth-grade class at Memorial-Spaulling. This was the culminating performance task of Module 1 of the EL curriculum. Students synthesized their learning by reading their original poems, inspired by something meaningful, sharing the inspirations behind them and craft moves used to write them, and introducing the following speakers. Their presentation answered the question, "What inspired you to write poetry, and where can you see evidence of this in your poem?"

Each student had two slides displayed behind them - one with the text of the poem and one with visuals - photos or other images they selected and some key text from the poem. There had been great collaboration with the English Language Learning teacher, Jackie Mahoney, and the Instructional Technology Specialist, Lisa Vancans, as well as Rebecca Lebowitz, the Literacy Specialist. There were many families in attendance, including some grandparents and younger siblings.

### **Reports Coming: Public Meeting Schedule for Decision-Making Around Facilities**

Just a reminder for the committee of the report schedule coming so that you can plan blocks to read and create questions and public discussion on this important topic.

[Long Range Planning Calendar of Reports/Presentations](#)

### **Cultural Days**

I attended my first cultural day at South last week, Disability Awareness Day, and a panel of alumni and current South students educated peers about their daily lived experiences and their successes and challenges in high school and in the work world. Incredible Day!

In addition, this day included a district-wide celebration of Inclusive Schools week during which classes and schools held various education sessions and celebrations of all of our varied learners and our district's inclusive values system.

### **Student Led Cultural Days**

Each year, student-led clubs and organizations sponsor cultural and social awareness days at both high schools. These days are designed to raise awareness and provide information about specific issues, cultures, and global topics of interest to high school students.

Most importantly, these days are created for students by students. They give students voice and agency to lead on an issue or topic that is of importance to them. It also provides the entire school community with an opportunity for learning, engagement, and connection. Also in the mix is the desire for all types of students to see themselves in the student group representations of the school.

At both high schools, the days are set up so that teachers/staff sign their classes up for sessions that occur during a specific block in the high school schedule. We share this with you so you can review the offering of days and talk about them with your family. This advance notice allows you (families and caregivers) to determine how to frame the conversation your family would like to have about the topic areas and decide how your child might participate. Please know that as a learning community

Committed to helping our children live and lead in an increasingly diverse, complex and changing society, we expect students to take on new learning options, even if they seem different or hard for them to understand at first. In the sessions I have observed at South, staff model asking questions, exchanging diverse perspectives, and disagreeing and agreeing in discussions. These are key skills for students' futures in work and study.

Students have significant First Amendment Rights in schools and may exercise their rights freely, subject to time/place/manner restrictions (e.g. student clubs, places designated by schools for clubs and student displays.) The First Amendment applies to public schools and schools cannot censor student speech that does not disrupt the educational process. *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District* (1969). These rights can only be limited in certain special circumstances (e.g. incites violence).

Student organizations, affinity groups, and clubs have the ownership of these days and staff intervention and support is limited because of the clear delineation that this is student-based expression/activity. District policy guides the vetting of speakers for classroom instruction, but cultural days are a balance of staff review and the student group's right to free speech and expression.

We take pride in student leadership and in our role of supporting them as they explore their identities and educate the student body. Dialogue and collaboration of this type is necessary to build community and understanding within a diverse learning organization such as Newton Public Schools. Exposure to learning of this type, and the companion conversations with families and caregivers, are training for the future of leadership and work in our increasingly complex world.

Below are the proposed days for schools thus far this year. You can expect each high school principal to share specific details about each of the days as they come up in the school year. Dates and events are subject to change so please see your school's weekly e-blasts for updates and details.

Please note, as students dream up new events and days, they may be added to the calendar or, as students decide to drop the events, they may be eliminated.

## **SOUTH**

October 10, Hispanic Heritage Day

December 6, Disability Awareness Day

December 19, LGBTQ+ Awareness Day

March 8, Black Culture Day

March 22, Asian Culture Night

April 8, Jewish Cultural Expression Day

April 10, AAPI Day

April 26, AWARE Day (mental health awareness)

## **NORTH**

December 8 - Civics Day. C&F Block Options.

February 1, Asian American Culture Day: Thursday,

February 16, BLAC Day, Black Leadership Advisory Council

March (TBD) Women's History Month Student Panel

April 12, ToBeGLAD (LGBTQ+ cultural day)

January 26, HLU Day (Hispanic and Latinx Culture Day)

Jewish Culture Day (TBD)

“MENA Day” Middle East & North Africa Culture Day: TBD

## **Communication Features**

Please follow us on Facebook (Newton Public Schools) and Instagram (@newton\_ps) to follow the below featured content!

**Tuesdays:** Terrific Tuesdays–highlighting the creative, innovation and exciting work of students and teachers in our schools

**Wednesdays-Did you Know? Wednesdays**—highlighting different aspects of the district related to how schools have changed in the past decade which contributes to the complexity of the average classroom in Newton. This feature also showcases the focus on data and the analyses staff are doing to show differences over time and to use our data to show the needs and celebrations of the district.

**Fridays: Staff Feature Fridays**—highlighting the special work of specific staff across the district.

**Profile of a Graduate Seminars Upcoming** (workshops moved to later in January)

January 17, 2024 North Auditorium, 6-8:30pm

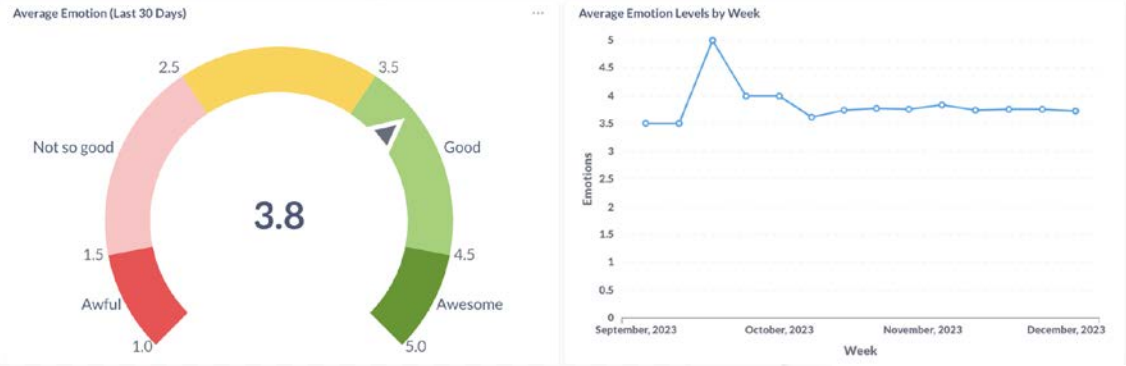
January 18, 2024 South Auditorium, 6-8:30pm

These community sessions are required for anyone interested in participating in the profile of a graduate creation project for the district in the coming months but anyone and everyone in the community is invited. The Battelle for Kids group, who will facilitate the creation of our profile, will present a program on the future of college and the work world, so that the community can understand what environments we are preparing our students for as we contemplate their futures. Schools should adapt to the needs of students and their futures. Join us!

### **Sown to Grow**

Sown to Grow is a social-emotional learning tool used by our middle schools to understand how students are doing relative to their mental health status. Teachers see individual student data on the day and over the week and month, and see a dashboard of their classroom needs. Counselors, social workers, teachers and administrators check in with students based on these results.

See dashboard sample below.



**MON, DECEMBER 4, 2023, 12:00 AM**

● Good	267	45.80 %
● Okay	170	29.16 %
● Awesome	106	18.18 %
● Not so good	28	4.80 %
● Awful	12	2.06 %
<b>= Total</b>	<b>583</b>	<b>100 %</b>

**Signs of Suicide Screenings** are beginning in the schools, parents whose children are in our selected grade levels, 7 and 11 are notified by letter of the survey. Its intention is to assess student mental health and signs of suicidality so we can support students more fully, alert parents and get students what they need to be healthy.