



Office of the Superintendent

To: Newton School Committee
From: Anna Nolin, Superintendent
Re: Superintendent update
Date: January 8, 2024

It's only been a week of school since we last had a superintendent update as the December break has recently concluded. We hope you had a wonderful rest with family and a strong start to the new year.

Class of 2024!

Class of 2024, your graduation day will be here before you know it! We are proud of your leadership and work in our system! We also know that this time of year is exhilarating and sometimes exhausting for our seniors. Everyone is always asking, "What's next for you?" and this can create happiness and stress for our students. If you're interacting with our seniors, consider chats that do not force students to share their outcomes in groups if they do not want to. (This is a request from some members of my student advisory group!)

Weather and School Cancellations

With snow undoubtedly on our minds, I wanted to refresh families about how our snow decisions are made. As a city/school team the total needs of the city roads, sidewalks, plow availability, road temps, time of snow, condition of utilities and safety of travel/time of day are considered. In addition, we have to consider that for some students, school is where heat and food are—some children eat two meals and snacks with us each day. It is not a light decision to have to miss a day of school. I love a good snow day as much as anyone, but my job is to keep kids in school as much as possible. Check our website for updates and keep your ringers on for calls from me when snow determinations are being made. We try to do them the night prior, but most likely, decisions will be made the morning of a weather event. Developing your family "plan B" for child care, travel or dealing with school closure the night before a weather event is a strong idea.

Budget Season Begins!

This part of the year kicks off the budget season and I want to remind the public that there are many opportunities to hear district proposals included in this year's budget. [Please see the FY25 Budget Calendar here](#) of those experiences and we will update it as the dates are confirmed and/or revised. Notable changes made to this calendar, based on feedback from entry planning meetings, is to add a special session for city councilors and another special session for seniors to be held at senior center locations across the city. These residents would like to become more acquainted with our budget and what is in it!

Student Services Department Learns Together!

On December 20 from 1:30-3:00 p.m. the Elementary Special Education Department and Related Service Providers participated in a professional development opportunity with Elise W. Wulff, MEd., Senior Program Manager, at MGH Aspire. The topic of the workshop was: The Neurodiversity Movement.

Schools, and particularly special education, have long been places where individuals strive to help all students be seen, feel valued, and work towards goals to unlock quality of life at school and beyond. And, the Neurodiversity Movement is shining a new light on how some current practices in the identification, assessment, support, and education of students with disabilities may not be as inclusive or person-centered as designed or intended. This workshop will provide an overview of the pillars of the Neurodiversity Movement (including associated terminology), implications and considerations for special education and related service providers, and recommendations to build more Neurodiversity-forward and informed practices.

NPS is focused on bringing cohesion amongst 3 departments: T+L, Student Services and Elementary Ed around instructional leadership through a partnership with the Center for Educational Leadership. The Instructional Leadership Academy (ILA) will help develop knowledge and skills of district leaders that include:

- Nonjudgmental methods for observing and analyzing instruction, including improved ability to discern inequities in student learning
- A broader, deeper culture of public practice that uses qualitative data to understand how students experience instruction
- Transformative skills in providing strengths-based, evidence-driven feedback as a tool to grow practice
- Strategies to support teacher learning by understanding the current state of teachers' learning culture

- A collaborative professional learning community with shared language and vision for equity, student learning and high-quality instruction

Assessing Progress

Progress Reports for Elementary Students will be released via Aspen to families on February 1, 2024.

- Winter assessment windows for literacy assessments are now through end of January Kindergarten early literacy screening letters/results available to families in Aspen on January 12th
- ACCESS testing for English Language Learner/Multilingual Students is occurring now through January at all schools
- ACCESS for ELLs is
 - Administered to Kindergarten through Grade 12 students who have been identified as English language learners (ELLs)
 - Given annually to monitor students' progress in learning academic English
 - Meets U.S. federal requirements of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) for monitoring and reporting ELLs' progress toward English language proficiency
 - Is anchored in the World Class Instructional Design and Assessment model (WIDA) English Language Development Standards
 - Assesses the four language domains of Listening, Reading, Speaking and Writing

Arts in Action

Prior to the winter break, the Fine and Performing Arts departments at both of our high schools sponsored winter concerts for students and faculty. Newton North featured their 14th annual holiday-inspired concert, and Newton South included an evening concert of their Jazz Ensemble with alumni graduates who were back in town for the winter. Each set of concerts included a terrific diversity of instrumental and choral performances highlighting different musical and cultural winter traditions in our communities. Our K-8 schools also featured their typical winter and holiday musical celebrations as well throughout the month, and it was great to see our young musicians on display as well.