

Hamilton-Wenham Regional School District  
5 School Street, Wenham, MA 01984

*Office of the Superintendent*

Dear Families of Hamilton-Wenham Students,

At this time of year, some families have made it a tradition to give gifts to teachers and staff members to show their appreciation. For those of you who have considered giving a gift, I need to inform you about the July 2009 revisions in the MA Conflict of Interest Law (Massachusetts General Law, Chapter 268A) and State Ethics Committee Rules affecting gift giving to school staff members and the HWRSD policy affecting gift giving to school staff members.

School staff members are public employees, and as such are subject to the laws and regulations regarding conflict of interest and state ethics. The statute and Ethics Committee regulations state that school employees may receive what is known as “*de minimus* gifts” that are valued at less than \$50, other than cash. *De minimus* gifts include multiple gifts or benefits given or offered within a calendar year by a single person or organized group of persons having common interest (for example, parents in the same classroom or grade). Simply stated, what this means is that families cannot combine resources to purchase a gift with a value greater than \$50. Teachers and other school employees could be subject to fines up to \$10,000 and teachers can suffer the loss of their teaching license if it were deemed that they accepted illegal gifts. The regulations were enacted to ensure that members of the public are treated equally and that no one has or might be perceived to have special advantages or influence. This applies even if the purpose of the gift is seen as a token of gratitude for a well-done job. The policy can also be found on the district website, [www.hwschools.net](http://www.hwschools.net)

Besides the state law and regulations, there is sometimes discomfort about the appropriateness of gifts within the school context or the feeling that gifts might be expected. As a school district, we believe that the best gifts are your kind words of appreciation. If you do wish to make a gift, we encourage families to consider making a contribution in the staff member’s name to one of the many groups which support the HWRSD. Donations to a school program, the Friends’ organizations, the Hamilton-Wenham Edfund, high school athletic booster clubs, Friends of the Arts, etc. benefit teachers and programs at the HWRSD. Many teachers also enjoy knowing a gift was made to a charity. Each of these groups will ensure that the teacher receives notification of the gift made in his or her name. Many teachers also enjoy knowing a gift was made to a charity.

We in Hamilton -Wenham are very fortunate to have such generous families who support us in so many ways, such as formal recognition programs, lunches, volunteering, participating in school activities, and sharing words of gratitude. The School Committee, the Principals and I would appreciate your assistance in this matter so as not to put school employees at risk. If you are at all unsure of how this law might apply, please contact your building principal.

Very truly yours,

*Marinel D. McGrath*

Superintendent of Schools