

Dear Staff and Parents,

Many of you may be aware that Governor Patrick signed into law G.L.c268A, The Conflict of Interest Law as Amended by c. 20 Acts of 2009. Although the Ethics Law has been in effect since 1976, it was amended and strengthened to allow the Ethic's Commission's ability to enforce the ethics laws and clarify existing law. This has been receiving a great deal of attention due to the fact that now all Massachusetts public employees, including all school employees, must receive a copy of the conflict of interest regulations and receive mandatory training on this topic. As the season of gift giving and expressions of appreciation is upon us, it is important to be aware of the requirements set forth in this law. While it is unlikely that teachers receiving tokens of appreciation from students and their families was the catalyst for the state government's recent emphasis on conflict of interest laws, it is important that our employees comply with their legal obligations. The purpose of the law and accompanying regulations is to avoid the perception that a public employee might display any type of favoritism due to the influence of a gift. Anyone in violation of these regulations is subject to civil penalties. While our parents often give gifts to teachers and staff at the holiday time as an expression of gratitude for their hard work, it is important that parents who choose to do so adhere to the requirements contained within the regulations in order to avoid placing our teachers and staff in an awkward position. These guidelines are as follows:

- Massachusetts General Law Chapter 268A and State Ethics Commission rules prohibit all public employees from receiving personal gifts of "substantial" value," which according to the regulations is **\$50 or more**. This includes meals, tickets, services rendered, holiday gifts, etc.
- The Ethics Commission has ruled that the \$50 or more restriction applies **even when a group of people pools their funds to contribute to a gift**. Therefore, if multiple parents of students in the same class contribute to the purchase of a gift for the teacher, the teacher cannot accept the gift if the total value is in excess of \$50 or more.
- The law and regulations apply to any single, personal gift to a public employee from an individual or group. An employee may accept multiple gifts from different parties, as long as each individual gift complies with the regulations. It is recommended that gifts or donations be made to the school and/or classroom, in the educator's name. These gifts or donations are not subject to the limit.

While, the Mansfield community has traditionally been very generous to our teachers and staff and while all of us in the Mansfield School Department appreciates all that you have done and continue to do, I ask that you please follow these guidelines so that our teachers and staff do not find it necessary to politely decline a gesture of appreciation. If you have questions about the law and regulations, please contact the principal or Superintendent's Office.

Sincerely,

Brenda J. Hodges

Superintendent of Schools