

May 10, 2004

Dear Parents,

Last fall I wrote to you regarding a School Committee policy and a Massachusetts state law that occasionally come into conflict with the generosity of many Wayland families. I did this to make parents aware of these regulations before they become an issue later in the school year.

With the end of the school year approaching, it has been suggested that I remind parents again of these guidelines and why they are necessary. Over the years, Wayland parents have proven to be unusually generous when it comes to thanking teachers and other staff for their work with their children. This is greatly appreciated by the entire staff and makes working in this community highly desirable. Our instructors and other school employees know that parents respect them and that their good work with students does not go unnoticed. Prospective teaching candidates are often told that this community repeatedly celebrates the good efforts of the schools' staff through a variety of public proclamations and special programs. Staff recognition activities take place throughout the year, and the sincerity of the words spoken in appreciation of a particular employee's efforts is always well received.

Oddly enough, a problem began to emerge last year that this letter is intended to address. Some generous gifts and tokens of appreciation violate either the School Committee policy on gift giving or the state's ethics laws. State law provides that all gifts in excess of \$50.00 per year per family to a public employee are improper and must be reported to the State Ethics Commission, and gifts of \$200.00 or more to either individual schools or classrooms must be presented to the School Committee for approval and acceptance. The State Ethics Commission takes the position that its rule applies equally when a group of parents combine resources to make a single gift if the total gift is more than \$50.00. It is important to note that staff members who accept gifts in excess of the state's \$50.00 notification requirement or the School Committee's \$200.00 limit risk being cited by the state or disciplined by the administration for failure to comply with established policy and/or state law.

Rules and policy aside, it should be noted that the generosity of some individuals and groups has raised questions as to the size and appropriateness of holiday and end-of-year gifts to staff. While saying thank you to a teacher or school employee who has had a profound influence on a child is commendable, I am concerned that there is a growing expectation that staff gifts are required at certain times of the school year. That is certainly not the case, and I want to be very clear on this point. While I believe expressions of appreciation and letters thanking people are highly treasured by the staff, no family or individual should feel obligated to do anything more for a school employee.

I would like to remind parents of a long-standing recommendation that signs of gratitude for the work of staff be acknowledged through donations in the name of a particular individual to any of the district's school-based groups (PTOs, CAPA, WPSF, WHSSC, Boosters, METCO, etc.). These organizations have well-established procedures for the distribution of funds to

schools and individual classrooms, and such donations are not affected by either School Committee policy or the State Ethics Commission rules.

I am not attempting to discourage gift-giving or saying thank you to a special school employee. Rather, my purpose is to point out the state law and School Committee policy, and to seek voluntary compliance with these requirements.

Parents with additional questions are encouraged to speak with any building administrator or call me directly. Your cooperation in this matter is greatly appreciated. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Gary A. Burton
Superintendent of Schools

GAB/dmm

Cc: Building Principals
School Committee