

PLYMOUTH RIVER SCHOOL GIFT POLICY

Hingham families have been generous and thoughtful in past years in their attempts to recognize the efforts of the school staff. However, recent change in the state law regarding gifts to municipal employees has necessitated a clarification of the gift giving policy for Hingham Public Schools and families. All Hingham Public School personnel are required to adhere to the Conflict of Interest Law (Mass General Laws Ch. 268A).

Our goal in providing gift-giving recommendations is to assist teachers and staff in their compliance with the law and prevent embarrassing situations (e.g., teacher returning a gift).

The sections of the law most relevant for school personnel state:

Municipal employees may not accept gifts and gratuities of “substantial value” (defined as \$50.00 or more) from an individual within a 365-day period. Gifts under the \$50.00 limit will still require a teacher to file a disclosure if given by a current student and/or family as this creates the appearance of a conflict of interest.

Teachers are allowed to accept gifts valued up to a maximum of \$150.00 per year from current students and/or families as long as the gift is identified only as being from the class, and the identity of givers and amounts given are not identified to the recipient. The teacher may not knowingly accept any additional gift from the parents who participated in the class gift.

Teachers may accept a gift from a group that is for the classroom or school with the understanding that these items are property of the school district.

In order to provide some clarity, the following guidelines have been developed:

Class gifts organized by room parents are the best option. All gifts should be marked as coming from the entire class (whether or not all families participate, and regardless of amounts given by each). Gifts given for a teacher's personal use must be valued up to a maximum of \$150.00 for the year. Any gift given for classroom use would become property of the school district. If giving a gift certificate to purchase classroom items, please be sure it is to an appropriate store (e.g., office supply, bookstore) as the teacher will have to document purchases with receipts.

If families are interested in giving individual gifts, students should be encouraged to offer alternatives to material items. For example, students could write a thank you note or perform an act of kindness in the name of a staff member. There are a number of ways for students and families to demonstrate gratitude that does not include purchasing a gift.

It is NOT recommended that families purchase their own gifts for staff or teachers. If you do then you must limit any purchased personal gifts for the staff to a total of \$49.99 per school year (this includes all gifts given including holiday, end-of-year, and other). It is the responsibility of the staff person to record the value of each gift and file pertinent disclosures. Gifting items that exceed the \$49.99 value puts the staff person in the awkward position of having to refuse a gift in order to comply with the Conflict of Interest Law or face potential fines.