



## NORTH EAST SCHOOL DISTRICT

50 EAST DIVISION STREET • NORTH EAST, PENNSYLVANIA 16428  
TELEPHONE (814) 725-8671 • FAX (814) 725-9380

Dr. Michele Spurgeon Hartzell, Superintendent

Mr. Jeffrey Fox, Business Manager

Mrs. Shelley Allen, Administrative Assistant

October 29, 2021

Dear North East Residents:

Over the past month, I have received a number of responses from parents and students concerned about public comments on LGBTQIA+ issues. To be sure all are receiving the same response, I have prepared the following. As always, we encourage parents and students to share concerns directly with the building administration. While all concerns may not be addressed, our hope is that you know that we understand and have heard your concerns and would like to share what we have been doing.

We need to be sure all students feel supported by all school and district efforts. This includes different awareness activities planned throughout the year such as Red Ribbon week, suicide awareness, disability awareness, Black History month, Safe2Say, bullying awareness, cancer awareness, Move the Mountain, and Prom Promise. No student should feel excluded by a topic.

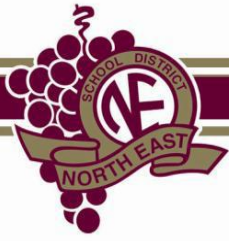
We have been taking steps towards meeting the needs of our LGBTQIA+ populations. We have made accommodations for this population like we would for any other student in our district.

As a district we have brought in an expert in the LGBTQIA+ field, Dr. William Kohler, PhD, a clinical psychologist and trauma informed counselor to present to our entire staff so we would have a better understanding on how to meet the needs of this population of students. The high school and middle school Student Assistant teams have also met over the past year with Dr. Tyler Titus, another expert in the mental health profession, for additional training.

We have parents that have been at board meetings that have shared different viewpoints and we are trying to be as sensitive as we can to accommodate both sides. I would like to address comments made at the most recent Board meeting as not all of the information was correct.

With regards to the Safe Space cards, they were not removed and this information was incorrect. We also have 8 x 10 Safe Space signs with members of the faculty listed that feel comfortable in helping to provide information for students who may have questions regarding gender identity. These are still posted as well. What was asked to be updated and relocated were signs at the middle school that had our district mascot holding a pride flag. The administration was asked to update this flyer to be the same sign as is posted at the high school. I have received dozens of letters from both students and parents on their perspectives in this matter. We are trying to honor, respect, and be sensitive to the opinions of both sides. Given these politically charged times, in consultation with our Board Attorney, we also asked one high school and one middle school teacher to voluntarily remove their large pride flags from their classrooms. Again, as a public educational entity, we want to make sure that we are not promoting ideologies in any direction and we need to be sensitive to the needs of all children.

The reality is that COVID has put everyone on edge and we are asking everyone be patient and kind as we navigate through both new and old challenges so we can meet the needs of all students. Administration will continue to meet with this population of students so we are addressing and meeting their needs as we would for any other child in our district.



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As we move into the future, we will continue awareness activities that represent all or portions of our student body and we need to work together so we are addressing concerns brought forth. We also know that due to COVID-19, emotional and mental wellness is at the forefront. As a district we have a K-12 Social-Emotional program. I previously sent a letter regarding SEL and this information can be found on our district website; however, two important areas addressed are self-awareness and social-awareness. As with other topics, we try to create a balanced approach to teaching and learning to ensure we have a conceptual understanding, even on sensitive topics, and we are meeting the needs of all students.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read 'Michele S. Hartzell', is positioned below the word 'Respectfully,'.

Dr. Michele S. Hartzell, Superintendent