

Maine School Administrative District No. 11
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Patricia Hopkins
Superintendent of Schools

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Angela Hardy
Director of Curriculum & Instruction

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Dear Families/Students/Community Members:

I have received a number of questions about a recent change in policy regarding the display of flags at Gardiner Area High School, after an incident occurred between students last Friday. Under the terms of this new temporary policy, students at GAHS are prohibited from displaying flags on school walls without authorization from the administration, or from wearing flags as a piece of clothing. I am writing to you to provide some clarity on this matter.

At the outset, I want to be clear that the actions taken under policy should not, in any way, be understood to condone any of the conduct that occurred on Friday, or any actions that make any member of our student body feel unsafe. MSAD 11 is committed to providing an inclusive educational environment that is welcoming of all students. We do not tolerate bullying, harassment, or any conduct that targets students on the basis of a protected characteristic, including sexual orientation or gender identity. Fostering a safe learning environment for all students is a core element of our district's educational values, and is also required under Maine law.

As we implemented this rule, I understand that there has been some confusion about the status of previously approved flags placed on display on bulletin boards around the school, specifically those flags expressing support for LGBTQ students. Those paper flags, which were not the subject of the conflict on Friday, are not affected by this policy, and remain on display. This is consistent with the school's policies governing the display of items by student groups. I am proud of the work that MSAD 11 staff and students do to make our school a welcoming place for all, and I look forward to continuing this work in the future.

I want to reiterate that this temporary policy was necessitated by a disruption that occurred last week, which could have resulted in injury to students. The policy was designed to narrowly target the flashpoint in the conflict between students that led to this disruption, and leave open ample means of communication and expression for students, while also ensuring student safety. This was a difficult decision to make, but one that we determined was necessary.

With graduation only a few days away, it is my hope that we don't let this situation overshadow the celebratory nature of the season. All of our graduating seniors have worked hard for years to reach this significant milestone in their lives, and it is crucial to celebrate their accomplishments. Graduation is a momentous occasion that signifies hard work, dedication, and perseverance. It is important to honor our graduates and their families for the sacrifices they have made to reach this point. Despite our current climate, let's be sure we still take the time to celebrate our graduates and show them that their achievements are valued and appreciated. It is a time to come together as a community and celebrate our graduates.

Sincerely,

Patricia Hopkins

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