

September 15th, 2009

Dear Families:

We have received our accountability status under the NCLB (No Child Left Behind Law.) Even though we exceeded our Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goal as a school in language arts, we did not reach it in math. Because of this we have been designated as a school in corrective action. The federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law requires that all schools make AYP in improving student achievement. We also operate a Title I program, which is a federally-funded program providing assistance to schools serving a certain percentage of students from high-poverty backgrounds. There are special consequences for Title I schools not making AYP in the same subject for three or more years:

- 1) **Extra Professional Development Money:** The law requires that we use at least 10% of our Title I funds to provide high quality professional development to our staff.
- 2) **Supplemental Education Services (SES):** Students from low income families may be eligible to receive free tutoring from an outside provider. In the coming weeks, families of eligible students that receive free or reduced lunch will be receiving a form to apply for SES. There is a limited pool of funds available for these services, so students who performed the lowest on the 2008 MCAS test will be given higher priority.
- 3) **School Choice - In-District Transfers:** The staff at the Veterans School already has a relationship with your child and wants to continue to serve your child all the way through fifth grade. However, if you so choose, you may make a request to me in writing by October 1st that your children be transferred to the Lynnhurst or Waybright schools in Saugus. Transportation would also be available. The Oaklandvale school is not available for transfer because it is also designated as a school in need of improvement.
- 4) **Comprehensive Improvement Plan:** Within 90 days, we are required to develop an improvement plan to remedy our achievement gaps. This includes: a full analysis of last year's results to find our areas of weakness, research-based methods to improve our performance, and ways to involve parents in the school's improvement process. Your input is an important component of this process as well, so I encourage you to attend our monthly PTO/School Council meetings.
- 5) **Implement New Curriculum:** This is being done with the new Envisions Math program for students in grades 1-5.

Over the next few weeks, I will be working with the school and district community in designing this improvement plan. We also want to make sure that we are not just teaching to the test, but improving the overall quality of programs. Here are some of the steps that are already being taken:

- **Curriculum Meetings:** For the last three years, teachers in the district have worked in grade level teams to improve instruction. During this time, we have analyzed the test results to find where our students struggled, refined a pacing guide for the math curriculum, shared teaching strategies, and developed common tests for each grade level. In addition, we reworked classroom schedules to add more math time to address areas of weakness. Furthermore, this summer, teams of teachers worked to create curriculum maps for every subject area in grades K-5. This work will continue to refine these

pacing guides, complete these common assessments, and link them to math curriculum in the middle and high schools.

- **Professional Development:** This is an essential part of our school improvement work. Our district's professional development committee is working on providing an array of professional development opportunities for teachers. One of these initiatives is the expansion of the Collins Writing program to all elementary grades. Another is the expansion of the Open Response workshops to mathematics content. This workshop series was very successful in helping us improve language arts scores last year. The district has also contracted with a data consultant to help us better analyze student test data and focus our improvement efforts.

- **Textbooks:** Last year, new math textbooks were purchased for grades 1-5 along with new language arts books for grades 4-5. The TouchMath intervention program has also been purchased which will serve struggling students.

- **Restoration of Reading Teachers:** This year, they will be able to spend even more time doing remedial work with students.

- **After-School MCAS Preparation:** As we have done in the past, we will be offering small group after school MCAS classes in the winter. These have proven very successful in giving all students extra skills in certain areas that our data analysis shows as a weakness.

- **Technology:** In the past two years, we have seen the power of computer software in improving student achievement. We will fully implement the successful Study Island and Accelerated Reader programs, and pilot the Lexia program to address early phonics difficulties and continue to use FASTMATH to remediate weaknesses in the knowledge of math facts.

As we complete and implement the improvement plan, I will update you about what weaknesses we found in our performance, what further steps we are taking, and what you can do to help. We are committed to serving your child and will use all the resources available to help our students achieve.

Sincerely,

Uri Harel, Principal