



September 27, 2011

Dear Parent or Guardian,

I am writing today to share information regarding the federal No Child Left Behind Law (NCLB) and the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) designation your school has received as part of this law.

Parents and teachers have long expressed concern that NCLB unfairly labels schools based on a single test given once per year, and the percentage of students in the school who pass the test. We all know it takes far more than a single test to evaluate how well our students and schools are doing. What matters more is how students are growing and learning, not just over the course of the school year, but over the course of their academic career. All children should do better and better as time goes on – that's what makes a good school and a good education.

Unfortunately, NCLB does not measure schools this way. In addition to using one test score as the primary determination of a school's success or failure, it also compares the performance of one group of students to the performance of a totally different group of students the following year. This is not a fair, valid or accurate way of measuring how schools are really doing.

In the coming months, the Minnesota Department of Education will work with the U.S. Department of Education to provide relief from this law that will allow us to develop better accountability measures for Minnesota's schools. Relief from the most troublesome provisions of NCLB would be of tremendous benefit to our state. It would maintain a level of accountability to ensure all students are learning to a high standard and at a rate that prepares them for success in college or the workplace – and it would allow us to apply a more appropriate and realistic measure of gauging school effectiveness.

An AYP determination should not be seen as a red flag, but rather as an invitation to learn more about your child's school. The best way to measure your child's and your school's progress is to look not only at your child's test scores and other class work, but also by visiting with your teachers and principal, and by visiting and volunteering at your school. We also invite you to visit the Minnesota Department of Education website at <http://education.state.mn.us/mde/index.html> where you will find a great deal of information about all of Minnesota's schools.

We are hopeful Minnesota will soon be granted the regulatory flexibility to provide our state's children, parents and stakeholders with a school accountability system they deserve. In the meantime, please feel free to contact the Minnesota Department of Education if you have questions about AYP or NCLB. We will continue working with parents, teachers, administrators and the public to make sure our state and federal education policies work as well as possible for all of Minnesota's children.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dr. Brenda Cassellius".

Brenda Cassellius, Ed. D.
Commissioner