

August 5, 2009

Please find below a copy of the letter you received last year in regard to Benkelman Elementary receiving a “needs improvement” rating from the Nebraska Department of Education in the area of free and reduced lunch students in grades 3 through 6. Fortunately this past year our students in the above mentioned category did exceed the requirements to be taken off the “needs improvement” list. However, federal guidelines require you to exceed the requirements for two consecutive years to be taken off of the list. Therefore, we are required to resend last years’ information. Again, please find it below.

March 9, 2009

Dear Patrons,

As you are no doubt aware the federal government enacted the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation a number of years ago. As a part of this legislation each school receiving federal funding must meet the conditions of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for each grade grouping of elementary, middle and high school. One of the requirements of AYP is a minimum proficiency attainment level in reading and mathematics. The levels are set at an ever increasing rate with the ultimate goal of 100% proficiency of every student by the year 2014. Currently 81% of our 3rd–6th grade students must meet proficiency in reading and 83% must meet proficiency in mathematics. In addition one other indicator, writing, is figured into the AYP formula applied by the State and Federal governments. If a school is found not to meet such standards for two consecutive years in one subject area in the same grade level, they are given a designation of “not met” and are considered to be in “school improvement”.

This past year we had a very good year with 23 of 24 sub groups exceeding the state standards complying with NCLB. We had one sub group, “free and reduced lunch” math students grades 3 through 6 at Benkelman Elementary that fell below the proficiency level of 83% placing us in the needs improvement category. This sub group consisted of 48 students and only 16 of the 48 did not obtain proficiency. The group of 16 included special education, English Language Learners and migrant (high mobility) students.

To the credit of our students and staff the “free and reduced lunch” sub group did achieve 19% growth over last year. State and federal regulations allow for proficiency to be met with 10% growth, this is referred to as “safe harbor”. Unfortunately, due to our low numbers; the Nebraska Department of Education does not recognize our 19% growth.

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Haigler Elementary and Stratton Elementary, also Title I schools, together with Benkelman Elementary did meet state accountability requirements. Haigler and Stratton Elementaries do not have large enough populations to be considered for Federal AYP requirements.

What does this mean for our school and our students? Because we are considered to be a Title 1 school in Title 1 school improvement year one, we will be putting several elements into play to help move our school out of school improvement.

- First, we will establish a support team to give input and guidance as we work towards improvement. This team will consist of local staff, parents, and administrators; external support from our ESU or other knowledgeable entities; and personnel from the Nebraska Department of Education.
- Second, we will be offering after school tutoring and summer school in mathematics for any Benkelman Elementary (K-6) student meeting the Title I criteria.
- Third, as always has been allowed, we will allow any student who wishes to transfer to one of the other elementary buildings in the district the opportunity to do so. The public school choice option is required by the No Child Left Behind Act if more than one school is available for students to attend. Transportation will be arranged to accommodate those families wishing to make this move. We do require that your request for movement for this year be made within 14 calendar days of receipt of this notice so that all arrangements can be made for a smooth transition with as little interruption to the education process as possible. Please contact me as soon as possible if you choose this option. Please make your request for next school year by May 21st of this school year.
 - Over 150 Benkelman Elementary students were given the option to transfer to either Haigler Elementary or Stratton Elementary. In the 2008-2009 school year no transfers occurred. In the current school year, 2009-2010 the option to transfer was not accepted by any students.
- Fourth, we are working with our teachers to make sure the curriculum is aligned to state standards and that the latest research on effective instructional strategies is available.

As with any intervention, we must allow sufficient time for progress to be made. We will continue to monitor the progress of students as we move toward compliance with these state and federal regulations. We must meet the achievement goals two consecutive years to be released from the school improvement designation. We do believe we have a quality educational system and that our students are learning. We welcome parent input and ask that you contact me with suggestions or concerns.

Sincerely,



Michael Rotherham, Elementary Principal
Dundy County Stratton Schools