Burwell Public Schools

"Home of the Longhorns"

190 I Street, PO Box 670
Burwell, NE 68823

October 19, 2015

Dear Parent/Patron,

The federal education legislation, No Child Left Behind (NCLB), mandates that all students must be proficient on reading and math state academic standards by 2014. Schools are expected to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) toward that goal. **The NCLB goal for last year was to have 100% of all students in grades 3-8, & 11, be proficient on the reading and math standards.** Additional information about how our school compared to other schools will be available for public viewing on the State of the Schools Report October 16, 2015 on the NDE website at: http://www.education.ne.gov/documents/SOSR.html.

If a school does not meet the state goal two years in a row, in the same grade level and same subject, they are identified as "In Need of Improvement." A school can get out of School Improvement Status after all subgroups meet the AYP goals for two consecutive years.

Burwell Elementary is in year 1 of Title I School Improvement Status. The following table illustrates our students' overall performance over the past two years.

	Reading		Math	
	2013-2014	2014-2015	2013-2014	2014-2015
Grades 3-6	90.43% overall	85.86% overall	91.49%	85.86%
Grades 7-8	75.56% overall	91.67% overall	97.78% overall	93.75% overall
Grade 11	96.43% overall	64.29% overall	92.86% overall	71.43% overall

One subgroup in grades 3-6 did not meet the 2013-2014 goals in reading. Two subgroups did not meet the reading goal in 2014-2015. *Burwell Elementary will* remain in School Improvement Status until all subgroups are able to meet the reading goal two years in a row.

The No Child Left Behind Act requires each school identified for Title I School Improvement to offer Public School Choice to all students who attend the identified school. Our students do not have another choice of schools at the same grade level within our district and as a result there is no transfer option available to our students.

Attached is a copy of a letter from Dr. Matthew Blomstedt, Commissioner of Education with the Nebraska Department of Education, to schools who did not meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). The purpose behind the letter is to hopefully help parents better understand the guidelines involving No Child Left Behind. Congress is in the process of reauthorizing the No Child Left Behind legislation.

All students benefit greatly from parents being involved in many ways. Asking questions, having students read aloud, and setting aside a time and place for homework are only a few of the things that you can do. Your child's teacher can give you additional strategies to work on at home. Student achievement is a partnership between school and home; and a strong partnership has been proven to be effective in helping student achievement.

Please call Mr. Goodman, Mr. Owen or Mr. Bird if you have any questions about the AYP status or the plan to improve the academic achievement of all subgroups at the elementary.

Sincerely,

Dan Bird

Dan Bird, Superintendent
Burwell Public Schools

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NEBRASKA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

To: Parents and Caregivers
From: Matthew Blomstedt, Commissioner of Education
Subject: Nebraska's Commitment to Every Student, Every Day
Date: September 28, 2015

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), was passed in 1965 during the Lyndon B. Johnson administration as part of the War on Poverty. The act emphasized equal access to education, established high standards and accountability, and authorized federally funded education programs administered by individual states. Congress amended ESEA in 2002 and reauthorized it as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. The law was scheduled to be reauthorized in 2007; to date Congress has not taken the necessary steps to update this law. In recent months, both the Senate and Congress have passed their versions of what they believe should be included in reauthorization of the ESEA. The next step is for members of both the Senate and Congress to form a Conference Committee to come up with a single plan for reauthorization. It is anyone's guess whether ESEA will actually be reauthorized by the end of this year.

When states and districts agree to accept federal funds, there are strings attached. Attached to NCLB Title I funding is the stipulation to have statewide assessments and Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) decisions for every public school in the state. Under NCLB, the proficiency goal for school year 2014-15 for reading and mathematics assessments was set at 100%. According to the NCLB rules, every student -- regardless of disabilities, English language proficiency, or other life-impacting circumstances -- must be proficient in reading and math as measured by state assessments. Because of this unrealistic goal, a number of Nebraska schools will be unfairly labeled as *Not Met* or *In Need of Improvement*.

The Nebraska Department of Education does not agree with the current federal policy. I do not believe that all of our schools are low performing. In fact, the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) has granted waivers from the unrealistic expectations of NCLB. Common sense tells us that one child in one grade in one subject area scoring just below a "proficiency cut score" should not brand an entire school community as failing. Yet that is exactly what has happened under NCLB. As a result of this faulty logic, some schools or districts in Nebraska have not met the NCLB requirement for the 2014-15 school year.

In April, 2015, Nebraska submitted a request to the USDE, for waivers from several of the NCLB requirements. NDE has had follow-up conversations with USDE staff, but to date no formal response has been received. This means that for the 2014-15 school year, all NCLB requirements must be followed. NDE was hopeful that some of the requirements, such as the 100% proficiency goals for

reading and math could be waived, but our real hope is that reauthorization takes place very soon, so that all states will be relieved of the unrealistic and harsh consequences of the current law.

Nebraska educators are committed to each and every young person reaching his or her full potential and we are proud of the significant academic progress of our students. While not all students have reached proficiency, the use of targeted resources to assist struggling students and schools has had an impact which is seen in performance data not taken into account by NCLB. Our students, staff members, and schools are not failures. By many measures, they are demonstrating unprecedented levels of achievement. We continue to strive for improvement and excellence in our public schools.

We are committed to continuous improvement. Gains in student achievement are due to the collaborative efforts of teachers, staff, parents, and community members through high-quality instruction, effective leadership, and partnerships. We know that tests are an important part of teaching and learning, but we also understand that basing a student's achievement on a single assessment does not capture everything that is important for our children's learning journey.

As a state, our biggest challenge is finding better ways to engage and support the learning of every student, every day. Nebraska continues to develop and refine a system for Accountability for a Quality Education System, Today and Tomorrow (AQuESTT). The State Board of Education believes that Nebraska citizens—through the Constitution, the Nebraska Legislature, the State Board of Education, the Commissioner of Education, and other policy makers—are responsible for the total design of this education system. While acknowledging that this education system will be influenced by others, (federal government, other state leaders, and local policy makers) this system will be dependent on and driven by local boards of education, administrators, teachers, parents, communities, and students. This belief requires that we listen well, communicate better, and engage leaders and stakeholders across the state. The goal is to build a quality accountability system that is meaningful to Nebraska. The AQuESTT system focusses on six tenets which are part of two broader principles. We believe that each tenet is equally important.

STUDENT SUCCESS AND ACCESS	TEACHING AND LEARNING
Positive Partnerships, Relationships, & Student Success	College and Career Ready
Transitions	Assessment
Educational Opportunities & Access	Educator Effectiveness

As a parent or caregiver, we encourage you to look at your own child's individual growth and learning, along with evidence your school provides related to your child's progress instead of an outdated mislabeling requirement imposed by the federal government. We also encourage you to work with your local educators to ensure that every child is challenged and supported, learning, and thriving. Schools prosper when parents and caregivers are involved as the first teachers of their children.