



The Northbridge Public Schools

Town of Northbridge

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Susan M. Gorky, Superintendent of Schools
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Dear Parent or Guardian:

The Northbridge School District is dedicated to providing all students with the educational foundation necessary to succeed in school and in life. To ensure your child's success, we work to set high standards for learning that are reflected in what is taught in our classrooms. Under the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), student learning is measured each year to determine whether or not schools, particularly Title I funded schools, are making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Adequate Yearly Progress is measured in Massachusetts through the results of MCAS tests which students take each spring.

To make AYP, each school must achieve up to 54 separate targets. These include targets for participation, performance, and improvement in English language arts and mathematics for all students in a grade level, as well as for eight subgroups of students (Limited English Proficiency, Special Education, Low Income, African American/Black, Asian or Pacific Islands, Hispanic, Native American and White). Our students' scores are often represented across several of the subgroups.

Recently, the Massachusetts Department of Education released a report on the progress our schools are making towards achieving proficiency for 100 percent of our students under NCLB. This report identifies whether schools have made AYP – a simple “Yes” or “No” grade based on the complex set of measurements. If one subgroup misses one target, an entire school does not make AYP. Overall, our school system is making adequate yearly progress in teaching our students. However, data released by the State Department of Education indicates that Balmer School is listed as needing improvement in parts of its academic program.

Balmer School was listed as not making AYP in English language arts and math for both the aggregate grade level, and White and Low Income sub-groups. For this reason, Balmer School has an AYP designation as School in Need of Improvement – Year 1. This designation alone does not indicate a school is not successful. It highlights where more work is needed. AYP is an all-or-nothing proposition, focusing only on MCAS tests. It does not consider all the other factors that contribute to successful schools.

Please be assured that every member of the Northbridge Public Schools team, staff, administration and School Committee is committed to achieving our number one goal, success for all learners. We are taking immediate actions to raise our academic expectations and active engagement for all our students. Balmer staff will be meeting during the September 1st professional development day to receive specific training on using our new Storytown reading series to better instruct students in reading strategies, comprehension, vocabulary, and writing. Our professional development days planned for later this year will provide information on developing performance standards and grading rubrics in both English language arts and math in order to better differentiate instruction to meet the needs of diverse learners. We will also be analyzing the school's MCAS test scores to identify specific areas of the curriculum that need to be enhanced.

Our schools and community must form partnerships to ensure the development of the health and well being of our children and youth. We need to improve students' academic knowledge and skills to effectively prepare each learner with the necessary competencies to be successful in the 21st Century. I encourage you to join us in addressing our challenges and applauding the great work our students and staff are doing in all Northbridge Public Schools classrooms. I welcome your comments, suggestions, and involvement in our schools.

Sincerely,

Susan M. Gorky

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Superintendent of Schools