

September 10, 2014

During the 2011-12 school year, the United States Department of Education (USED) invited each State educational agency (SEA) to request flexibility on behalf of itself, its local educational agencies, and schools, in order to better focus on improving student learning and increasing the quality of instruction. Last month, the North Carolina Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Flexibility Request was approved by USED.

This opportunity will provide educators and State and local leaders with flexibility regarding specific requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) in exchange for rigorous and comprehensive State-developed plans designed to improve educational outcomes for all students, close achievement gaps, increase equity, and improve the quality of instruction. Additionally, states are required to identify three specific categories of schools (Priority, Focus, and Reward) under methodologies approved within the Flexibility Request.

I am writing to let you know that J.H. Gunn Elementary has been identified as a Focus School by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. Focus Schools are identified as a result of the achievement level of “in-school gaps between the highest achieving and lowest achieving subgroups” in terms of proficiency (reading/math) over a number of years or, schools with subgroup proficiency scores less than 50% over a number of years.

Focus Schools must select interventions providing the following considerations:

- Aligned to the school needs assessment
- Supported through school processes (e.g., increased learning time)
- Effective instructional methods or practices appropriate for identified subgroups
- High quality job-embedded professional development
- Use of data
- School safety and discipline
- Family and community engagement

We continue to strive for improvements in student achievement. The vision for J.H. Gunn is to develop and produce literate, critical thinkers who are lifelong learners and respectful, responsible, contributing citizens.

We have set the following goals for J.H. Gunn this year:

- Increase the average scale scores on state assessments in reading and mathematics by 5% within each of our subgroups.
- Increase the percentage of students with perfect attendance by 5%.
- Utilize students’ academic outcomes in teacher evaluations.
- Set goals for staff professional development, and monitor the extent to which that professional development has changed practice that will lead to closing the achievement gap.
- Develop teacher leaders in our school who will enhance the learning process for our students and close the achievement gaps for the students in our school’s subgroups.

Our students need to experience higher achievement levels, and it will require hard work on the part of staff, students and families. Here are some strategies J.H. Gunn will be implementing:

- Balanced Literacy approach, including Reader’s and Writer’s Workshop
- Increased Teacher Effectiveness through Coaching
- SIOP training
- Multi Tiered Support System (MTSS) model training
- Analyzing data from Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) assessments in reading and math
- Utilizing MAP and AIMSweb data to make instructional decisions
- Using data from Kathy Richardson AMC Anywhere assessment program to differentiate math workshop activities for students in grades K-2
- Mentors for New Teachers

Parent involvement is at the heart of our school improvement efforts. Here are some ways you can help:

- Join the J.H. Gunn School Leadership Team (SLT).
- Make sure that both you and your student are aware of academic expectations set for your student this school year. A list of learning objectives in student-friendly language is available from your student's teacher(s).
- Call J. H. Gunn's main office at (980) 343-6477 if you have questions or concerns about your student or to set up an appointment to meet with school staff members who work with your student.
- Make sure that your student is prepared and attends school each day.
- Monitor your student's homework.
- Monitor and limit the amount of time your student spends watching television and playing video games.
- Monitor the progress your student is making and attend meetings with your student's teacher(s).
- Volunteer.
- Join the Parent Teacher Association (PTA).

Sounds like a lot, doesn't it? Preparing our students so that they can succeed against 21<sup>st</sup> century demands isn't easy. But it is essential. Here are some resources available to help:

- Our school Social Worker, Patrick Narcisse, can be contacted at (980) 343-6477.
- Our school Counselor, Sharon Beatty, can be contacted at (980) 343-6477.
- Our school Behavior Management Technician, Rhonda Lynch, can be contacted at (980) 343-6477.
- Graduation requirements: [www.ncpublicschools.org/gradrequirements/](http://www.ncpublicschools.org/gradrequirements/)
- K-12 standards in academic subjects: [www.ncpublicschools.org/acre/standards/](http://www.ncpublicschools.org/acre/standards/)
- State student achievement test results: [www.ncpublicschools.org/accountability/](http://www.ncpublicschools.org/accountability/)
- N.C. School Report Cards: [www.ncreportcards.org/](http://www.ncreportcards.org/)

We're excited about this school year and are working to make it a success for your student. Already, we have:

- Title I Family Nights (Literacy, Math, and Science)
- A partnership with Providence Day School
- Monthly meetings for Spanish-speaking parents
- Girls on the Run
- Read-a-Thon
- Student of the Week
- Honor Roll assemblies
- Math Olympiad
- Science Olympiad
- Science club
- Fire and Life Safety Team
- Student Government
- Student Safety Patrol
- Intramural basketball and step teams
- Terrific Kids
- Character trait celebrations

Sincerely,

Monique Davis, Principal