

Aug. 12, 2009

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: SJSD Curriculum Office, 671-4000

SJSD OFFERS SCHOOL CHOICE DUE TO 'NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND' SANCTIONS

Despite "Distinction in Performance," Top Ten School rankings and outperforming the state, the St. Joseph School District has collided with punitive sanctions of the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) program.

Because Edison and Noyes Elementary Schools did not score high enough on federally mandated tests for two consecutive years, parents of children attending those schools now have a school choice option for the coming year. In addition to their home school, parents may elect to send their children to Coleman, Field, Hyde or Pershing Elementary Schools.

Those four schools are offered because they are the only elementary schools that have made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for the past two years. Under NCLB, schools must hit annual targets on the mandated tests. In order to have made AYP this year, 54.1 percent of students had to score in the upper two levels (roughly, the equivalent of an A or a B) of the Missouri Assessment Program test in math; the target for communication arts was 59.2 percent.

The target increases seven to nine percent each year, and will culminate with 100 percent of students expected to score advanced or proficient by 2014. In the SJSD, students are divided into eight subgroups (White, Hispanic, Free/Reduced Lunch, Special Education, etc.) and if any one subgroup fails to make AYP, the school itself fails to make AYP. In addition, school districts fail to make AYP if one subgroup fails make AYP.

Statewide, only 26 percent of school districts made AYP; 42 percent of all Title schools are in some level of school improvement.

Most NCLB sanctions are directed at what are called Title I schools – those that receive certain federal dollars and, therefore, over which the federal government has some control. The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education is expected to review District curriculum, suggest better alignment to state standards or possibly defer some programmatic dollars.

School officials were disappointed with the news.

“We have known that this day was inevitable, given the eight and nine percent increases in the targets,” said Dr. Melody Smith, Superintendent. “However, it is very disappointing. Our teachers, principals and students have worked hard and done outstanding work.

“We were recognized as a ‘Distinction in Performance’ district earlier this year, and we receive numerous Top Ten rankings from the state each year,” she said. “We are still that district; nevertheless, we have to improve.”

In fact, the District outperformed the state average in terms of those scoring in the advanced and proficient levels: math – 47.8 percent for the state, 53.1 percent for SJSD; communication Arts – 51.4 percent for the state, 56.6 percent for SJSD. (Both state and District percentages are based on the “with growth” calculation, which reflects individual student improvement.)

The actual MAP test results indicated some bright spots as well as problem areas, said Cheri Patterson, Associate Superintendent for Curriculum.

“Our elementary schools held very steady, which means they did quite well,” said Ms. Patterson. “Our Special Services children showed wonderful gains, our middle school algebra students scored very high and our high school students did well in communication arts.”

High school math scores were disappointing, however.

“While this was the first year for this test, we’re going to take a hard look at our curriculum, as well as best teaching practices at districts that scored high,” said Ms. Patterson. “We’ll make the adjustments necessary to improve; we are going to improve.”

The District did not make AYP, which is driven by the content area targets. Of the 16 subgroups (eight in math, eight in communication arts), the District made AYP in three.