January 29, 2020

Dear Parents/Guardians of Third Grade Students:

It is hard to believe that we are over halfway through the 2019-2020 school year. As a parent of a third-grade student, I hope that you have seen great improvements in your child’s reading and writing ability this year. Literacy continues to be a prioritized goal of the district and we have been working very hard to ensure that each child can read and write well and independently at grade level. Regardless if your child has an Individualized Reading Improvement Plan (IRIP) or participates in our Junior Great Books enrichment, the impact of the Read by Grade Three Law takes effect this spring.

I thank you in advance for your time in reading this letter through the end and I encourage you to contact my office or your child’s teacher or principal with any questions or concerns that you might have.

As a former elementary school teacher and principal, I believe that it is vitally important for children to gain strong literacy skills at an early age. Reading proficiency is a strong predictor of success in middle school, high school, and life beyond high school.

As we prepare for the implementation of this state law, I wanted to take the opportunity to share a few things that we have been doing to support each of our students’ success in reading and writing.

- We seek to recruit and retain the best early childhood education teachers possible.
- We provide ongoing literacy coaching and professional staff development which integrates the General Education Leadership Network (GELN) “Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy”.
- We have embraced and embedded the principles of the Reading Now Network.
- We have partnered with Ready for School to provide preschool opportunities, playgroups, parent education, and “Start School Ready” Summer School Camps.
- We have enriched our early childhood continuum of services to include pre-school: Head Start, GSRP, and Transitional Kindergarten.
- We universally screen all Kindergarten students to develop an early childhood program based upon the unique needs of each student.
- We have implemented Individualized Reading Improvement Plans (IRIP’s) for students needing additional assistance.

Although there is an emphasis on literacy throughout the school day, we also need your support. Helping your child have multiple opportunities to read at home for additional practice plays a vital role in their success as a reader. As a partner in your child’s education, we encourage you to communicate with your child’s teacher regarding their progress. We are committed to ensuring that your child receives the foundational literacy skills necessary to help thrive in our diverse and ever-changing world.

In 2016, the Michigan Legislature passed a law that requires schools to identify learners who are struggling with reading and writing and to provide additional help. The law states that students may repeat third grade if they are more than one grade level behind beginning with the 2019-2020 school year. Based on this 2016 law, third-grade students must achieve a minimum of 1252 in reading on the state M-STEP
assessment in order to be promoted to the fourth grade. Students who do not score proficient on the M-Step with this score will receive a letter from the state of Michigan by June 1, 2020 indicating that they are subject to retention.

If you receive a letter from the state of Michigan stating that your child is being retained in third grade based on their performance on the M-STEP assessment, you have the right as their legal guardian to request a good cause exemption.

Prior to you receiving a letter from the state of Michigan, Holland Public Schools has a process in place to conduct parent meetings at the District Administration Building immediately after the student scores are available. District staff will explain the good cause exemption process and will support parents in filing an exemption within the required 30 days after parent receipt of the notification. Parents filing an exemption will receive written notification from the State within 10 business days of receiving the request.

A study committee comprised of teachers, administrators, instructional coaches, district administration and diagnostic staff from special education have met several times over the past two years to learn more about the impact of the Read by Grade Three Law and to identify district-level good cause exemptions that would prevent a student from being considered for retention:

- Consideration of students who receive special education services through an IEP
- Consideration of students participating in the Two-Way Bilingual Immersion Program
- Consideration of English language learners
- Students who demonstrate proficiency and/or growth on other reading measures used by HPS

As Superintendent, I will be personally meeting with the parents of any child who does not meet a good cause exemption and is recommended for retention in early May. I do not believe that universally implemented, retention is a good practice. However, I do believe that in some cases, it has shown to be effective. I believe that it is important to look at each situation on a case by case basis. Students who attended Transitional Kindergarten or Young 5’s in HPS or another District and/or have been previously retained, will not be considered for retention again.

At your parent-teacher conferences coming up on February 5, 11, or 13, your child’s teacher will be discussing with you where your child is currently at in his/her proficiency, interventions being used, and their concern as to whether or not your child may be at risk of possible retention. There are many things that can still be done together as your child prepares to take the M-STEP during the week of April 27, 2020.

Our philosophy is to provide your child with quality instruction starting in Kindergarten, Transitional Kindergarten, and for many students, pre-school. When a student is struggling in any subject area we will continue to support their instruction with additional programs and early interventions in order to help them be successful throughout their career in HPS. As your partners in education, we are here to support you.

Sincerely,

Brian Davis, Ph.D.
Superintendent