

# FAIRVIEW INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

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Stakeholders of the Fairview Independent School District,

Kentucky's accountability system has recently been redesigned to include an overall star rating for schools, districts, and the state. Schools and districts have been assigned an overall rating of 1-5 stars based on specific indicators designed to measure performance on the state assessment. The new accountability model is made up of six indicators, including:

- Proficiency (KPREP Reading and Math for elementary and middle; ACT Reading and Math for high school)
- Separate Academic (KPREP Science, Social Studies, and Writing)
- Growth (KPREP Elementary and Middle School Only)
- Graduation Rate (High School Only)
- Transition Readiness (Previously College and Career Readiness, High School Only)

Fairview Elementary School and Fairview Middle School received one star, Fairview High School received two stars, and the Fairview Independent School District as a whole received one star under the new system for the 2018/2019 school year.

The Kentucky Department of Education did not release overall district classifications during the 2016/2017 and 2017/2018 school years while the new system was being developed. I am bringing this to your attention because the need for improved performance outcomes on our state's assessment in our district was present in years prior to this year. In Fairview Independent, our performance on the state assessment is not a new concern this year, but is clear to the public in receiving a one star rating under Kentucky's new accountability system this year.

With the release of data this week, all schools in our district are now identified as Comprehensive School Improvement (CSI). Upon identification as CSI, the SBDM Council is dissolved and the authority and responsibility for improved outcomes is placed on the superintendent. Many members of the public do not understand that when a SBDM Council is in place at a school that the superintendent is not allowed to interfere with decisions that are considered to be SBDM Council decisions. An example of one of these decisions directly related to performance on the state assessment is the decision around curriculum adoption and implementation in a school.

All CSI schools and the school district of the CSI school receive an audit by the Kentucky Department of Education. The audit results in the district and school receiving information that may be used in the development of turnaround planning. Additionally, the Kentucky Department of Education determines

the leadership capacity of the principal of the school and the superintendent of the district to lead turnaround. When identified as CSI last year, Fairview Elementary received an audit and results were received in February, 2019. The Kentucky Department of Education made the determination that I do have the capacity to lead the turnaround needed in our district. The district will not receive an audit again this year. Fairview Middle/High School will go through an audit this year. At Fairview Middle/High School, we will receive information following the audit that will assist in leading turnaround.

Areas of focus put into place last year and being continued this year at Fairview Elementary are proven to create sustainability and long-term growth. This includes intervention at all three levels, new curriculum implementation, a new schedule that not only allows for equity in learning at all levels but an emphasis on protecting instructional time, and an intentional focus on data and using data to improve learning as part of a Professional Learning Community (PLC) process. Although audit results were not received at Fairview Elementary until February, 2019, educators focused on improvements starting this time last year. This year at Fairview Middle/High School, work has already centered around meeting the needs of each student, new curriculum, instructional practice, and high expectations for all students. We are committed to continuously improve in our work as we develop and revise plans and implement practices that result in a high level of student achievement for each student.

As you are aware, our district started to endure significant financial constraints in 2015 when we lost \$1.4 million annually in utility tax receipts due to decreased operations of AK Steel. Additionally, enrollment declines started in 2015 resulting in a loss of over 170 students, 21% of our enrollment, from 2015 to the start of last year. The majority of our district's funding comes from our state's SEEK funds based on enrollment. Our district has had less and less revenue every year. This has resulted in many being concerned that our district would not be able to overcome our financial situation and remain open. There was a lot of uncertainty from day to day in our school district and community for years. In an effort to remain open, every year our district cut more and more resources in order to maintain the 2% contingency (savings) required by the Kentucky Department of Education for our independent district to stay open. This has directly impacted all operations of our district, including our school and district performance results on our state assessment.

When I started as the new superintendent last year, I made it a priority to be transparent and have honest communication with you regarding our district's financial situation. After years, we had finally reached a level of financial instability as a district that would result with our district's closure at the end of last year if we did not have significant financial improvement. It could not be delayed any longer without a change in finances.

Last year, with the support of our Board of Education, I did everything I could to focus my work on significant financial improvement of our district so that our district could not only avoid closure at the end of last year but would be in a state of financial stability. Efforts to improve our finances have been multi-faceted and complicated to say the least. The list of many contributors impacting the outcomes of this effort is far too detailed to address in this letter. Many decisions have been made, some popular and some unpopular, some easy and many that have been difficult.

All of that said, we have just recently finalized our annual working budget. Our general fund ending balance for fiscal year 2019 is \$813,000. To help you better understand the amount of this increase, in years 2016, 2017, 2018, our ending balance was \$235,818, \$227,304, \$227,434, respectively. This is an increase of approximately \$575,000 in only one year. Additionally, our contingency (savings) has grown to 10.6%. It is important to understand that the amount of \$813,000 does not include the approximate \$80,000 generated locally that we will start to collect on the nickel tax this year. It also does not include the sale of the Renfro building that is not yet final. We will also lose \$120,000 in utility tax receipts this year with the announcement that AK Steel will close at the end of this calendar year. This amount has not been included as revenue in our working budget as it has been in the past. Also, we do not intend to take the \$200,000 loan that we are eligible for based on the work of our legislators with HB272. We do not need to take this loan due to our improved financial situation. Additionally, the \$813,000 is after we have included additional expenses in this year's budget of almost \$100,000 more for facility needs that could not be addressed in recent years, additional preschool staff as part of our preschool restructure put in place last year, additional support services, an AmeriCorp tutoring position starting this month, etc. Also impacting our financial situation is good news regarding enrollment. For the first time in six years we have maintained our enrollment from last year to this year with a slight increase.

Again, there are many pieces to this puzzle and it is quite complicated to explain the details of all of the work that occurred last year in a letter. However, I can tell you that we have turned our financial situation around. We are financially stable. Keep in mind, I would not describe our financial status as "good" but instead as "stable". We have many needs in our district that cannot be delayed any longer and with these needs, it wouldn't be accurate to say our financial status is good. It is for this reason that it is crucial that our district receive support from the general assembly in their matching of our nickel tax in the state's biennial budget. If we receive the match, this will result in an approximate \$280,000 of additional funding every year in our school district.

With our improved finances, we can now support immediately some of the prioritized needs in our district by providing additional resources. Our Board of Education is committed to improving student achievement. This year, we must start to address some of these needs immediately and wait for the legislature to make a decision about our nickel match this year. During this time, it is crucial that we protect our financial stability, prioritize need, and focus on supports and resources that yield the greatest results. Like district finances, the work we are doing to result in improvements in our district's performance on our state assessment is quite complicated. It involves efforts focused on systematic improvement as well as financial resources that as of this year we have available to accomplish this task. In addition to funding some immediate needs now, our district will be eligible to receive improvement funds for next year. This is added to the intentional efforts we have on continuous improvement of all parts of district operations. I have no doubt that we are on the right path that will result in us reaching our goal this year of being a three star district and our longterm goal of our district performing in the top 10% of Kentucky's school districts.

Over the past year, a quote I have thought of often... "It isn't where you came from, it's where you're going that counts." I know that the struggle Fairview Independent has experienced will be behind us soon. Just as our financial situation has improved, I am very optimistic that our performance on the

state assessment will as well. Actually, I am beyond optimistic – I have no doubt and know this will happen with our intentional focus. As I've told many of you before, I have been called to lead this work in our district. The positive financial outcomes we've experienced in my role leading this work should not be credited to me, but a greater purpose and plan. Fairview is a very special school district and our students, educators, families, and community deserve nothing but the best. Every educator in this district believes our belief statement, "As a team, we will be difference makers in the lives of our students by giving each child our best in everything we do." Just as we are thankful for the support of our families and community, I assure you, the educators in Fairview are true difference makers for students in this district each and every day and they are committed to a vision of our district performing in the top 10% of our state. It will happen!

On Tuesday, October 8, 2019, please join me at 5:30 PM in cafeteria at Fairview High School where we will go over many more details of our plans for continuous improvement not included in this letter. Also, on October 22, 2019 at 5:30 PM, please join me for a community financial update on our district where we will go into greater detail regarding our finances. If neither of these opportunities are convenient for you, please do not hesitate to contact me to discuss.

Future Focused,



Jackie Riden-Smith

Superintendent