



October 3, 2011

Dear Parents/Guardians of Students at Willits Charter School:

NOTICE OF SCHOOL IDENTIFIED FOR PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT: YEAR 1

The purpose of this letter is to inform you that Willits Charter School has been identified as a Program Improvement (PI) school under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001.

What Is PI?

Our charter school receives funding from many sources, one of which is Title I, Part A, a grant from the federal government. As a condition for receiving these funds, NCLB requires all states to create academic standards that identify what a child should know and be able to do in kindergarten through grade twelve in English-language arts and mathematics. California already has highly regarded content standards in place in our schools. Schools must then test students each year to determine if they are proficient in these subjects. Each school is reviewed annually, using a system approved by the California State Board of Education, to determine if students at that school are making adequate yearly progress (AYP). AYP is based upon several factors including:

- California's accountability measurement of progress, the Academic Performance Index (API)
- The percentage of students scoring at the "proficient" or "advanced" level on the California Standards Tests for English-language arts and mathematics
- The percentage of students participating in those tests
- For high schools, the graduation rate

When reviewing the progress of schools in the district, the state looks at the school as a whole and subgroups¹ of students. In order to make AYP, each school must test at least 95 percent of its students and 95 percent of students in significant subgroups. Targets are set for the percent of students scoring proficient, and that target increases each year with the expectation that all students will score proficient by the year 2014. Every school and subgroup is also expected to increase its API and graduation rate each year.

The California Department of Education (CDE) must annually publish the data necessary to determine if each school has or has not made AYP. *Only schools that receive Title I, Part A, funds and do not make AYP for two years in a row are identified for PI.* Each PI school must take certain steps to give parents choices concerning their students' education and to improve the school's performance.

A report of the PI status of all schools is available on the CDE Web site at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/ar/index.asp>. If you do not have access to the Internet, contact Sally Rulison and ask her to provide this information to you.

¹ A subgroup is numerically significant and included in the AYP report if there are 100 students or more with valid test results or 50 or more students with test results who make up at least 15 percent of the total valid scores. There are ten subgroups that are used in the AYP: African-American or Black, American Indian, Asian, Filipino, Hispanic or Latino, Pacific Islander, White (not of Hispanic origin), socioeconomically disadvantaged, English learners, and students with disabilities.

Why Is Our School PI?

Using information from the tests given last spring, Willits Charter School was identified as PI for the following reasons:

- The school, or one or more subgroups of students, did not meet annual state targets in English-language arts.
- The school, or one or more subgroups of students, did not meet annual state targets in mathematics.
- The school did not meet the Academic Performance Index³ (API) growth target.

Your Right to Request a Transfer

All parents/guardians of students attending a PI school have the right to request a transfer of their children to a non-PI school. Students enrolled in direct-funded charter schools have the option of returning to their “home” public school. If the home public school is a PI school, the student may request a school transfer to a non-PI school in the home district, with paid transportation, by contacting the district.

The home district will pay for transportation costs. The number of students who can transfer with paid transportation may be limited by the amount of money available to pay for transportation costs. If there is not enough money available, the lowest-achieving students from low-income families will be given priority. However, you can always request a school transfer to a non-PI school **without** paid transportation.

Although you have the right to request a transfer of your child to a non-PI school in the home district, a non-PI school is currently not available at your child’s grade level within the district, and unfortunately, neighboring districts are not accepting students for transfer from our district. Therefore, we are offering after-school tutoring services for those students who need additional help at your child’s school. Please contact Sally Rulison at 459-5506 if you are interested in tutoring services for your child.

What is the School Doing to Improve Student Achievement?

The Mendocino Lake Leadership Network is working closely with Willits Charter School to improve curriculum, instruction, and student performance at the school. Listed here are some of the steps that have been taken or that will be taken by the beginning of the second semester of this school year.

- We have started a new math program that is designed to help students who are not at grade level in mathematics.
- Students in need of help can receive after-school tutoring in English, science, history and mathematics.
- Students will be, or have been, assessed to determine current reading level. Reading instruction will be embedded in all core curriculum.

³ The Academic Performance Index ranges from 200 to 1000 and summarizes a school's or LEA's performance based on student results on statewide tests. Schools must show a growth in the API of at least one point or a minimum API score.

- Teachers will be forming a professional learning community to encourage collaboration and develop plans for supporting struggling students.
- We will work to help parents become more involved at the school and at home.

What Is the State Doing to Help Our School Improve Student Achievement?

NCLB requires each state to establish a statewide system of support to help LEAs with PI schools. The intent is to ensure that all students enrolled in PI schools meet the state's academic standards so that the schools will no longer be in PI. California provides information, special help, and access to resources for these schools.

Willits Charter School is working with the state and others to improve student performance. Listed here are some of the steps that already are under way or that will be in place by the beginning of the second semester of this school year.

- A team of experts will help the school to revise the school plan.
- Teachers will participate in professional development workshops and further training.
- The director and curriculum advisor are participating in the Mendocino-Lake Leadership Network to help the school analyze data from student assessments to better understand needs.

How Can Parents Help to Improve Student Achievement?

Although it often is difficult to find the time, you can help to improve student achievement at your child's school by becoming involved. Here are some things you can do:

- Learn more about the new NCLB requirements. Additional information and resources are available at the following Web sites:

The California Department of Education, <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/sw/t1/titleparta.asp> and <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/sw/t1/titlepf.asp>

The U.S. Department of Education, <http://www.ed.gov> and <http://www.ed.gov/parents/landing.jhtml?src=fp>

- Attend the School Site Council meetings to revise the school plan. The school plan should address the issues that caused the school to be identified for PI. Please call Erin Vaccaro (459-5506) if you wish to become a member of the school site council.
- Visit your child's school and volunteer to help in the classroom or office.
- Participate in activities that encourage parents to get involved at your school. The research shows that strong parental involvement leads to student success at school.
- Be sure your student attends school every day unless they are sick. School attendance helps insure your student receives the instruction necessary for their success.

For additional information or concerns, or to find out more information about how you can help at your child's school, we encourage you to contact Sally Rulison at 459-5506.

Sincerely,

Sally Rulison, Director
Willits Charter School