



3/24/2014

Dear Staff of Lincoln Basset Community School,

There is no doubt that this is an extremely challenging time for Lincoln-Bassett School – both for students and staff alike. However, with this urgent challenge comes a great opportunity for transformation – the kind of real change that can launch our children into a bright, successful future.

The time to act is now. We are in the midst of change, both from a long-time administrator, and in planning for next year as part of the Commissioners Network. The recent audit conducted by the State Department of Education highlighted serious and alarming concerns about the climate of the building, the quality of instruction students are receiving, staff divisions and engagement, organizational cohesiveness and student behavior problems. I'm sure these findings were not surprising to you who are on the front lines in classrooms at Lincoln-Bassett. But if we work together as a team of caring educators, leaders and support staff, we can take Lincoln-Bassett School in a new direction both this year and next.

As I said to you last Monday, and have repeated since, handling this situation cannot be about blame. We – staff, teachers, leadership, central office and the surrounding community - must all take collective responsibility for the current state of education at Lincoln-Bassett School. We must also take collective responsibility for raising this school up and doing right by our students and families. All focus must be on students. I am asking every adult at the school to put the best interests of kids first in all that you do.

We in central office have a clear share of responsibility. Lincoln Basset is a school with significant needs, and I have been slower than I should have been through the course of the year to fill those needs. You have noticed increased presence in the school last week, from both central office and support staff such as the truancy team. We intend to continue that this year. We are identifying and assigning additional staff to support in classrooms, hallways, and the lunch room. We will work with leadership to identify and staff a refocus room, and specific procedures to support it. We are indentifying a personal development and mediation program that can support both staff and students in delivering themselves to the important work of classroom learning. And we are open to other suggestions about how we can help this year.

I also want to be clear about the expectations I have for *\*all staff\**, which explicitly includes teachers, administrators, and supporting staff - cafeteria workers, office-clerks, paraprofessionals, custodians, volunteers, and all adults who contribute at the school. The goal of these expectations is to be sure we have a respectful, supportive, and constructive environment that supports students.

- Adults at Lincoln Basset need to be professional and respectful in their interactions with each other and with parents and students. If there are concerns or differences – and there always are when work is important and urgent – those concerns and differences should be addressed not in the moment, but at an appropriate time and through an appropriate channel.
- Classroom instruction and management must strive to engage all students, reflecting the rigor of the New Haven Public Schools curriculum and must include support for all students in the Lincoln Basset community. When students fall outside of acceptable behavior, the leadership team must provide appropriate discipline and redirection consistent with the Code of Conduct that will both



**Garth Harries**  
Superintendent

**New Haven School Change**  
NEW HAVEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Tel: 203-946-8888  
Fax: 203-946-7300

protect the learning environment for other students and create a learning and refocusing experience for the students concerned.

- Leadership must establish clear protocols and a chain of command, and be sure staff understand these protocols. This includes making themselves available to staff in case of classroom situations that require an immediate response – including back-up protocols when their attention may be pulled in multiple directions.
- No matter the difficulty of the situation, I expect adults to engage constructively for students and the Lincoln Basset community. For staff, that includes being present for students, and following attendance protocols rigorously. For leadership, that includes communicating openly, clearly, and supportively with all staff, providing the tools and support for staff to be as successful as possible.
- As we all work together, everyone should be mindful that the goal of coaching and feedback on both instruction and leadership is to develop and improve practice, not to play gotcha. I urge you all to be open to feedback, from whatever direction, as a way to improve practice and help strengthen student learning.

I ask that everyone at the school set aside differences and come together as a team with a common mission of supporting, educating and caring for students. This is a time to be extra tuned in to students' emotional states and help them avoid potential stressors. From my end, I vow to provide extra support to teachers who are handling students whose behavior is exasperated by trauma at home and stress at school. This is also a time for pushing ourselves outside of our comfort zone and adapting to new strategies for instruction and behavioral interventions. Remember, this is about what is best for our students.

As you know, Lincoln-Bassett has been accepted in to the SDE's Commissioner's Network and is slated for redesign for next fall. This opportunity means that New Haven will more aggressively push for dramatic transformation of student outcomes. The Commissioner's Network provides resources to support a redesign that will intensively strengthen and improve student learning and provide a wider network of supports for students and families. The anchor of this change beginning in the 2014- 15 school year will be a new set of student-centered work rules by which all staff must abide, including teachers, leadership, and other staff. The turnaround committee, including teacher, administration, and parent representation, will help to create that those foundational expectations. Once those work rules have been designed, staff who are unable or unwilling to abide by these new rules will be able to request a transfer to other schools within the district. In addition, the turnaround committee will work to identify mechanisms of extended time support, so that students and families can be fully served by the Lincoln Basset Community School.

Change is hard and we have to find ways to build teamwork among staff and focus our energy and attention on dramatically improving education for our kids at Lincoln-Bassett. I believe each of you is trying to do the best work you can for the Lincoln Basset students, and I also believe that the impact of that work is not as strong as needs to be for our students. The one thing I will not waiver on is the need to transform the learning environment, the mutual expectations among teachers and leadership, and ultimately the teamwork for our kids.

Very truly yours,

Garth Harries, Superintendent of Schools