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Kathy S. Houghton
Superintendent of Schools

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March 23, 2016

Dear Parent/Guardian;

New York Mills Union Free School District is one of 84 school districts statewide that has been identified as a Focus District by the New York State Education Department (NYSED). This identification is in accordance with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) waiver that New York State received from the United States Department of Education in June 2015. New York State was required to identify new Priority Schools, Focus Districts and Focus Schools no later than March 1, 2016. The 84 Focus Districts were identified because of low performance and lack of progress in ELA and Math, combined, or graduation rates for one of more accountability groups (racial/ethnic groups, low-income students, English language learners, and students with disabilities).

Decisions regarding the identification of Focus Districts are premised on the performance of students in grades 3-8 on (NYS) ELA and Math assessments; and identifications are made specific to sub-groups of students within the total student population. New York Mills UFSD was identified because of the combined performance of our students with disabilities on the New York State Grades 3-8 English Language Arts assessments for 2013-14 and 2014-15.

New York Mills UFSD submitted an appeal to the Commissioner, asserting that a high level of test refusals resulted in a significant reduction in the number of students taking NYS 3-8 assessments, which did not demonstrate a true picture of our students' capabilities. Student performance data for the 2014 and 2015 administration of the NYS 3-8 assessments were used to determine our identification as a Focus District, despite the fact that only 25% of enrolled grades 3-8 students took the assessments. According to NYSED, the Commissioner reviewed the appeal information and determined that New York Mills' status as a Focus District will remain in place for the remainder of the 2015-16 school year and throughout the 2016-17 school year.

As a result of this Focus District identification, New York Mills will participate in a district-led Diagnostic Tool for School Effectiveness (DTSDE) Review. The DTSDE review evaluates school and district performance in six areas: district leadership and capacity, school leader practices and decisions, curriculum development and support, teacher practices and decisions, student social and emotional developmental health, and family and community engagement. Through this identification and review process, we will focus our collective energy to study programs and identify ways to continually improve our total school program. As more information becomes available, and as the review process progresses, updates will be provided.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kathy S. Houghton".

Kathy Houghton
Superintendent of Schools