

SCHOOL DISTRICT OF SEWARD DECEMBER NEWSLETTER

Mission Statement

The school district of Seward, in cooperation with parents and community, affirms that all students will have the skills to become productive and contributing members of a global community. The district is committed to the development of each student academically, emotionally, socially and physically.



A New ESEA: Finally – From the Superintendent

This past week President Obama signed the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The old version, No Child Left Behind, had numerous flaws, but I don't believe it was a total disaster.

We have always had accountability in K-12 education, but NCLB raised the bar. Increased expectations can help improve schools, but increasing the expectations to an unattainable level sets all schools up for failure.

If I were to summarize, I would say that NCLB helped schools achieve more focus. We adopted standards and focused on those standards when teaching our students. It pushed schools to gather and analyze data and use the data to improve instruction not just to the class, but to groups of students and individuals within those classrooms. Schools started digging further into data for poverty students, English Language Learners, special education students, minority students, and so on. I think that before NCLB schools looked at their data, but not to the same degree.

So there were positives with NCLB, but there were also negatives. Over the years we have seen an increase in testing. Students have noticed, teachers have noticed, parents have noticed, as have administrators. We need to test to determine what our students know, so that we know what instruction is needed to get them to where they need to be, yet the theme I heard from parents, teachers, and administrators during our strategic planning sessions was that we want to have "well rounded" students not information regurgitating robots. I think we all realize the importance of standards and testing to help focus, but we also want our students to learn lessons that can't be measured with a test.

So how does the new federal bill change what we are doing today? Probably the biggest change with the new bill which they are calling the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), is that the federal government is relinquishing much of their power back to the state and local policy makers. With NCLB the federal government dictated the "what and the how". With ESSA, the federal government will continue to dictate some of the "what", but are giving states some leniency in determining "how" we meet their requirements.

Nebraska has been one of the few states that had resisted some of the tenants of NCLB, so we won't realize as much change in Nebraska as in other states, yet we will change some—it's too early to be specific.

Personally, I believe the reauthorization is a step in the right direction. Stay tuned!

Did you know?

Did you know that each year every school in the state gets a report card? The report card includes local, state, and federal information. The School District of Seward report card for the 2014-15 school year, and each year prior, is available on the internet at http://reportcard.education.ne.gov/Default_State.aspx

NEW TEACHER

Starting 2nd semester, we welcome aboard part-time preschool teacher DeAnn Warren. Ms. Warren has been a substitute teacher for the school district for a while, but with our recent increase in preschool students we brought her on board for to help with the preschool. Ms. Warren is a Concordia University graduate and has experience teaching various elementary grade levels in Lutheran schools from Alabama, Colorado and Minnesota. She also has preschool experiences in Minnesota, Lincoln, and Seward. Welcome DeAnn!

WEATHER RELATED SCHOOL CLOSINGS



Winter is near and dealing with something as unpredictable as the weather makes school closing decision-making one of the most challenging responsibilities for school superintendents. Whenever dealing with something as unpredictable as weather, mistakes will be made. The bottom line is that forecasts are not always correct, but ignoring them is not advised. If there are errors, I always hope to error on the side of caution.

I am eager to hear from the public on most school related issues. Weather related school closings are the one exception. As a superintendent I have to make the call and live

with the decision to have school or not. There are going to be many opinions, but I have to make the call on the information I have available at the time, and sometimes that information is not accurate. I apologize in advance because I know I will not always make the right call, but I guarantee you the decisions I make will be based on the best information I have at the time. If a decision has been made to have school, PARENTS/GUARDIANS ultimately have the right to make a decision whether or not they want to send their children to school. **If you think the roads are not safe for travel, then please keep your children home. Please call the school and let them know your plans so we don't wonder where your child is.**

If a decision is made to start late, school will begin 2 hours late with buses running accordingly. **There will be no morning pre-school if there is a late start.** School will be held when main roads are drivable. Buses will not travel untended or ungraded roads in bad weather even if school is in session. If it becomes necessary, you will be informed about pick up points that could be used when some roads are not passable for our buses. If we are having school and your road is not passable, please call the bus garage at 643-6069 and let them know if you have not heard from your bus driver already.

Once in a while a late start might be scheduled to give us more time to make a decision (see what the weather is doing). Continue to listen to school closing information as a late start could be changed to a cancellation please be prepared.

Unless some unforeseen event happens, a decision will be made by 6:30 AM and the decision will be posted on our website at www.sewardpublicschools.org and TV Stations (Channels 8 and 10/11). Weather related school announcements will also be made using **Bluejay Alerts**, Twitter, and Facebook. The alert system provides immediate messages/communications so you do not have to listen to the TV or radio to find out what is happening. We gather parent/guardian contact information off of PowerSchool, which is the student management software we utilize. If

your contact information is accurate, parents/guardians should receive notification. If you are not receiving alerts, you may contact Tom Widler at Seward High School.

In the event school is canceled or dismissed early, typically all activity and athletic practices will be canceled on those days and the school buildings will be closed. If we decide not to cancel school and parents want their children to come home immediately after school, parents have the right to excuse their children from practice due to weather.



The Nebraska Department of Education along with the approval of the State Board of Education has rolled out a new educational system called AQuESTT which focuses on six key tenets to help enhance teaching and learning across the state. The AQuESTT system also includes an overall classification system for each school and district across the state. These ratings were broken into four levels. Level 4 is excellent, level 3 is great, level 2 is classified as good, and a level 1 is classified as needs improvement. Seward Public Schools in all three schools and as a district were classified as a level 3, “Great”, District. The classifications of the schools and districts were based on NeSA scores in grades 3-8 and 11, graduation rates, student growth, and overall student improvement. There was also an Evidence Based Analysis portion of the AQuESTT system that was a self graded state survey that was completed by our district administrators. This survey included questions around the six tenets of AQuESTT. These tenets are: 1.) Positive Partnerships, Relationships, and Student Success - Student engagement through positive partnerships and relationships are crucial to student success. 2.) Transitions - Which focuses on the transitioning between grade levels, programs, schools, districts, and ultimately college and careers. 3.) Educational Opportunities and Access - All students should have the access to comprehensive instructional opportunities and be prepared for postsecondary education and goals. 4.) College and Career Ready - Students should be prepared for college and career goals after graduating from high school. 5.) Assessment -The results of multiple assessments should be used to measure student achievement and help guide instruction for students. 6.) Educator Effectiveness - Students should be surrounded by effective educators throughout their learning experiences, such that schools and districts develop effective teachers and leaders to help establish a culture of success. As a district we should be proud of the great things we do for all students, but know that there are areas in which we can continue to improve upon. More information about the how Seward did in the AQuESTT System can be found at <http://aquestt.com/resources/> please feel free to contact Dr. Fields if you have any other questions at (402) 643-2986.

SCHOOL BUS STOPS



We have high expectations for our students whether it be in the classroom, on the basketball court, or while riding on the school bus. It seems that we have a number of students who feel like rules do not apply while riding a bus. Parents, please talk to your children about your expectations for them to behave if they ride our buses. They need to remain seated, keep feet out of the aisle, keep hands and feet to themselves, and talk quietly to only the students near them. **The rules we have are there for the safety of every student on that bus and anyone else on the public roads as well.** We want our drivers to be able to focus on the road and spend little time dealing with inappropriate student behaviors. Thank you!

Dear Bus Parents: We are in the midst of a bus driver shortage. This isn't just an issue in Seward, but area schools are experiencing a shortage of drivers as well. Several factors contribute to the problem. First of all, the unemployment rate is low and there are currently many job opportunities for people looking for work. Also, the bar continues to be raised on bus driver training and requirements and I believe that contributes some to the shortage as well.



We have been advertising for a long time and though we get some interest, we still need additional bus drivers and substitute drivers. Why am I telling you this? First of all—I'm hoping that some of you might be interested in a part-time job!!! Secondly, I'm letting you know this because there may come a day when we don't have enough drivers to run our routes and cover our trips. If this happens we may need either your help or understanding in getting students to school or home. We would certainly communicate any changes with you and appreciate your understanding. Rest assured we are trying to avoid this if possible.

STATE PATROL, Sex Offender Registry

Are you aware that we have a number of sex offenders living in our school district in Butler and Seward Counties? Individuals convicted of sex offenses are required to register their place of residence and employment with the Nebraska State Patrol. Parents may access this listing on the State Patrol Website by going to <https://sor.nebraska.gov/Registry> . You can search by location and find registered sex offenders living near your home or our schools. As of December 14, 2015, Seward County had 31 sex offenders registered with 12 living in our school district. Butler County had 17 sex offenders registered with 3 living in our school district. If parents are not able to access this information and would like to, they may contact local law enforcement, the State Patrol, or Seward Public School's District Office.

We are required by board policy to report to parents that there are sex offenders living in our school district; however, I am also required to inform parents that you are prohibited from using this information for any retaliatory purpose against the sex offender, the offender's family, or the offender's employer.

I encourage parents to check this website on a regular basis in an effort to stay informed. I will also tell you that according to school policy, a sex offender who is the parent or guardian of a student may participate in education conferences unless prohibited by court order, but shall not otherwise enter school grounds or attend school events without prior, express permission of the building principal.

2015-2016 School District of Seward – BUDGET



During the September 14, 2015 Board of Education meeting, the 2015-2016 budget for all funds was approved. There are numerous funds in a school district budget, but the main fund for operation of the school district is called the General Fund. The General Fund budget of disbursements and transfers for the 2015-2016 fiscal year was set at \$20,487,054 which compares to \$20,048,149 budgeted in the General Fund for 2014-2015. This represents an increase of 2.3% in budget authority.

Please keep in mind that budget authority is just that. The school board passed the budget and thus we have the authority to expend up to \$20,487,054 general fund dollars; however, it does not mean that money is automatically spent. Generally at the end of the fiscal year

(August 31) there will be budget authority left, but we overestimate expenditures to cover any unforeseen expenses that may occur during the fiscal year.

On the receipt side of the budget, our state aid formula generated less state aid for our school district again this year. Formula state aid during this fiscal year will be \$40,564 which is down \$310,299 from the previous year. The valuation of the property in our school district increased by \$83,140,937 or 5.98%.

The local property tax asking for “all funds” increased by \$411,814 which was a 2.9% increase. We are aware that we are asking for more local property tax money even though our tax levies decreased due to the valuation increases. If your valuations increased significantly (mainly agricultural land) then your school property taxes increased even with the levy decrease. If your valuation stayed the same or slightly increased, you might see a decrease in your school taxes. Over all, our levy decreased by 2.9 cents.

2014-2015 to 2015-2016 Levy & Tax Asking Comparison

Fund	2014-15 Levy	2014-15 Tax Request	2015-16 Proposed Levy	2015-2016 Proposed Tax Request	Levy Change	Tax Asking Change
General	\$ 0.862678	\$ 11,988,067.06	\$ 0.826046	\$ 12,165,809.56	\$ (0.036631)	\$ 177,743
Bonds - H.S.	\$ 0.025186	\$ 350,000.00	\$ 0.023765	\$ 350,000.00	\$ (0.001422)	\$ -
Bonds - M.S.	\$ 0.098903	\$ 1,374,388.87	\$ 0.079113	\$ 1,165,151.50	\$ (0.019790)	\$ (209,237)
Special Building	\$ 0.020000	\$ 277,926.89	\$ 0.050000	\$ 736,387.69	\$ 0.030000	\$ 458,461
Qualified Capital	\$ 0.010540	\$ 146,464.65	\$ 0.008916	\$ 131,313.13	\$ (0.001624)	\$ (15,152)
Total	\$ 1.017307	\$ 14,136,847.47	\$ 0.987840	\$ 14,548,661.88	\$ (0.029467)	\$ 411,814

ENROLLMENT SUMMARY

Enrollment Summary as of September, 2015

Elementary

K = 87	Middle School	High School
1 = 85	5 = 95	9 = 104
2 = 97	6 = 128	10 = 139
3 = 92	7 = 100	11 = 120
4 = 97	8 = 107	12 = 130

Elem Total = 458 Mid. Total = 430 High Total = 493 Total K-12 = 1,381

HISTORIC ENROLLMENT

September of 2014 = SES-461, SMS-417, SHS-515, Total 1,393
 September of 2013 = SES-480, SMS-398, SHS-501, Total 1,379
 September of 2012 = SES-480, SMS-403, SHS-500, Total 1,383
 September of 2011 = SES-456, SMS-407, SHS-496, Total 1,360
 September of 2010 = SES-423, SMS-416, SHS-500, Total 1,339
 September of 2009 = SES-425, SMS-421, SHS-498, Total 1,344