

Sioux County Schools

2017 State of the Schools Report

This State of the Schools Report is a summary of the major areas of responsibility associated with providing a sound well-rounded education for all students. It is our desire to keep all patrons and families well informed of our history, achievements, and plans as a school district.

District Leadership

School Board President-Shon Whetham	Vice-President-Syd Meidell
Secretary-David Howell	Treasurer-Jackie Buhr
Member-Jud Skavdahl	Member-Karen Huntrods
Superintendent- Dr. Brett Gies	Pk-12 Principal/AD-Barry Swisher

Mission Statement

Sioux County Schools are a student-centered environment with a mission to provide knowledge through innovative educational resources while developing each student's confidence to impact the future.

Financial Statement

Year	Property Tax Request	Tax Rate	Special Building Fund	Tax Rate	Total Levy
2017-18	\$2,661,191	\$0.468	\$202,584	\$0.037	\$0.505
2016-17	\$2,545,843	\$0.49	\$80,808	\$0.016	\$0.51
2015-16	\$2,618,365	\$0.60	\$80,808	\$0.02	\$0.62

While Sioux County residents have experienced an increase in taxable valuations the last few years, the school district has strived to keep the levy as low as possible to offset the increase in the rising property valuations. Spending has been kept at a minimum but not at the cost of having a negative impact on classroom instruction, facilities or activities.

The school district has accumulated a five month cash reserve as recommended by the school auditor. The school district is fortunate to not be dependent upon state aid as many school districts have become. The majority of our funding comes from local property taxes which serves as the foundation for wise spending practices and more local control.

As with all school districts, we have to account for increases in operational costs each year. While costs continue to rise, we look for ways to operate more efficiently. We have added measures, equipment and resources, which will allow us to reduce operational costs and save money.

Student Enrollment Figures

Year	District	High School	Harrison Elementary	Pink School	Chalk Butte
2017	97	25	52	10	10
2016	106	27	57	11	9
2015	96	25	46	11	14

Student enrollment has remained rather steady over the past few years. Based on our current information and projections we are not anticipating an increase in enrollment in the near future. However, we should remain within our current enrollment figures for the next few years.

Student Achievement

ACT Scores- the ACT is a curriculum-based measure of college readiness and measures academic achievement in English, math, reading, and science. During the 2016-17 school year, the State of Nebraska required all juniors to take the ACT as the state mandated assessment. Due to student privacy and our small class sizes, it is difficult to share achievement data without revealing information that might single out a student(s).

Our junior class exceeded the state average in all content areas except science. The assessment results also indicated they are well prepared in the areas of English, reading and mathematics as they met college readiness benchmarks in those areas. This has been the trend for the past several years for our high school students.

2017 Average ACT Scores			2016 Average ACT Scores	
Content	District	State	District	State
English	23.2	20.9	25.4	20.9
Mathematics	22.3	20.9	22.0	20.8
Reading	22.2	21.9	26.4	21.8
Science	21.3	21.5	24.0	21.5
Composite	22.4	21.4	24.6	21.4

It is very important for students to score well on the ACT as colleges use the score to determine scholarships awarded to students. In past years, Mrs. Edmund taught an ACT prep class to all juniors as a means to help prepare them for the test. In the 2016-17 school year, high school teachers in science, English, and math also helped prepare students for the ACT starting in the sophomore year by

reinforcing content skills and knowledge. We want our students to not only score well on the ACT but also to learn the academic content.

The Nebraska State Accountability (NeSA) results are rarely shared publicly due to the small number of students taking the assessment in each class. Therefore, it is difficult to share assessment data without violating the student privacy act. Typically, our students outscore the state averages in all content areas. Teachers and administrators review NeSA results by individual students and discuss what the results mean in respect to the taught and tested curriculum. The Nebraska testing landscape will once again change during the 2017-18 school year, as the State moves to a new type of accountability assessment. The ever changing landscape also creates challenges in sharing trend data because the results cannot be accurately compared.

We are pleased that we can boast about having a 100% graduation rate for the past several years. Not many schools across the state and nation have that record.

NWEA MAP Assessments-Our school district has been administering the Northwest Evaluation Assessment Measures of Academic Performance (MAP) for the past several years. Students in grades 2-8 and 11 are assessed two to three times per year. Teachers use the assessment data to help monitor student progress and to adapt their instructional methods during the school year.

Beginning with the 2017-18 school year, the State of Nebraska is using the MAP assessment as the assessment to meet the federal mandates for testing. The testing scene has changed numerous times over the past few years in Nebraska, as in many states, as the federal government has been trying to implement accountability measures in schools across the nation.

Facilities and Grounds

We believe the school facilities and grounds should be well maintained and cared for as the schools are the showcase for local patrons and our out of town guests. Our schools are the center of activity for our community. It is our belief that students should have facilities that are clean and well maintained to optimize and enhance the learning environment so they can have a successful school experience and be well prepared for the next level of learning or work environment. Listed below are the major projects which were completed during the summer of 2017.

Family Consumer Science Room Upgrade-new counter tops were installed, the cabinets were refurbished, new stove tops, sinks and faucets were installed, and an expanded cabinet and storage shelves were installed. The walls and ceiling were painted as well. The upgrades to the FCS room will allow for easier clean up, more efficient use by our students, staff and community, and better instruction for our students.

Underground Sprinkler System- We installed an underground automatic sprinkler system at the high school and elementary school. The new systems will help reduce water consumption and waste which will result in lower water costs associated with keeping the grounds looking nice and functional for our students.

Energy Savings Performance Construction- After a careful study and analysis by an engineering company, it was determined to make improvements at both the high school and the elementary school

which would result in a better teaching and learning environment as well as reduce operating costs. At Harrison Elementary School, the ceilings were dropped to help reduce noise in the classrooms and to improve heating efficiency. New LED lights were installed in the classrooms and hallways for energy savings and improved learning environment. The aged rooftop heating/ventilation unit was replaced to increase reliability and performance. The aged hydronic unit heaters in the gym were replaced to help reduce noise and increase efficiency. A second pump in the boiler loop was installed to increase heating system reliability. Other measures were installed to improve performance to the heating system. A direct digital control system was installed so room temperature could be controlled which will improve comfort and save energy.

The high school T12 lights were replaced with LED lights to provide energy savings and an improved learning environment. The gym and Ag/shop were fitted with LED lights which will provide for better lighting and energy savings. Occupancy sensors and exit signs were installed as a safety measure in the hallways and gym which will function during a power outage.

The scope of work will result in energy savings, solve health and safety concerns, and create an improved learning environment. The total cost of this project was \$478,612.00. A down payment of \$86,000 was provided from unused funds from our 2016-17 General Fund Budget. The remaining balance was secured through a loan from Sandhills Bank with a 20-year amortization at 2.75% rate. The school board and administration are committed to paying off the note in five years or less.

Technology

The 1:1 Lap Top Initiative for students in grades 9-12 continues to thrive in our high school. Freshmen are issued a lap top in the fall. The students keep the lap top issued to them for their entire high school career. Each summer, Mr. Windsor services the lap tops and gets them prepared for the ensuing school year. Upon graduation, the students can purchase their four-year old lap top for fifty dollars.

Our students have proven that with responsibility comes privileges. Our students have proven themselves to be responsible with their lap tops and as a reward they get to purchase them at a very reasonable price. We have had only minor issues or mishaps since we began the 1:1 initiative.

High school students are also provided an iPad to use during their high school career. Teachers and students alike are using the iPads in numerous courses. The iPads are another means for students to access information quickly and it helps them prepare for college.

Students in our art classes taught by Mr. Rodenbaugh receive instruction on applications with Apple computers. The Apple computers add another dimension to help prepare students beyond high school and gives them an opportunity to experience the Apple world of technology.

An additional use of technology can be seen in our Distance Learning Lab. Students receive Spanish I and II from Southern High School in Wymore, Nebraska. Mrs. Hunter also teaches classes through the Distance Learning Lab to other schools across Nebraska. The school district receives funding for sending and receiving classes via the Distance Learning Lab.

Athletics & Activities

SCS students are afforded a unique opportunity not provided in larger school districts. Our students are able to participate in numerous athletic programs, FFA, Speech, National Honor Society, Quiz Bowl, One Act Play and several academic competitions. These opportunities allow our students to earn the right to participate at state and national level competitions. These expanded opportunities allow them to expand their horizons, knowledge and enhance life skills.

College and Career Readiness

College Credit Courses-Beginning with the 2017-18 school year, high school seniors will have the opportunity to take English composition classes for college credit. The classes are taught by Mr. Rohan and will require students to carry a heavier class assignment than students taking the class but not for college credit. In order for us to offer these courses to our students, Mr. Rohan had to obtain a Master's Degree in English which he completed this past summer. This opportunity will be a nice feature for our students as they can enter college already having completed English composition I and II classes.

School Improvement Process-An External School Review was conducted by a team of educators from across Nebraska. This review is required by the State of Nebraska under Rule 10, Regulations and Procedures for the Accreditation of Schools and is performed every five years. Mr. Valenta and Mrs. Edmund were the team leaders for our school district. They spent numerous hours compiling data, documents and records for the review team to analyze.

The external team visited classrooms at all locations, interviewed staff, students and administrators, and reviewed school records and documents. The review team gave many commendations to our school district. The commendations included:

- a.) Overall above average academic performance in all content areas,
- b.) The physical facilities are very well maintained and have been upgraded to meet technology demands and expansion,
- c.) Team building activities for staff and students are incorporated each year,
- d.) Professional development and data analysis is conducted by administration and staff in conjunction with the ESU #13 staff on a regular basis.

The team also provided a few recommendations:

- a.) Continue the successful collaborative Continuous School Improvement Process that is in place and expand upon it by incorporating students and community members,
- b.) Incorporate SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Timely) goals for all improvement areas listed in the Action Plan,
- c.) Use hard data whenever possible in the decision making process.

We had two major goals that focused our work for the past couple of years. Our academic goal was to improve writing across the content areas. We want our students to be proficient writers in all subject areas not just in English class. Therefore, we established writing standards for every class and subject, taught those standards to our students, and then implemented accountability measures to ensure

teachers were holding students to high expectations. Our strategies, focus and hard work paid off as our junior classes have scored proficient or higher on the state exam for the past numerous years.

Our second goal focused on creating school unity. The external team gave us high marks in this area as they noted much evidence of unity and pride in our students and staff members. The review team complimented us on the high level of dedication to making the school the center of our community.

Blended Learning Classes-In our desire to prepare students for college, all high school teachers are required to teach in a Blended Learning Class format. Simply stated, teachers design part of their lessons which require students to access notes, assignments, lectures and tests posted on the school district intranet. This type of learning is very similar to what they will experience once they enter college. The blended learning classroom environment also allows students to access their assignments when absent from school.

College Entrance-Student assistance in applying for college scholarships and for college entrance is a major benefit of attending SCHS. Mrs. Edmund does an excellent job of providing assistance and guidance to our students through the college scholarship application process. Our students earn numerous college scholarships helping them reduce college expenses.

School Safety

Although we live in a small tight knit community where everyone looks after one another, as a school district we still need to be vigilant in providing a safe and secure environment. As a means to be prepared should an emergency situation occur, we implemented the Standard Response Protocol as did several school districts across the state.

Standard Response Protocol- On February 22nd, Sheriff Chad McCumbers, school board members Syd Meidell and Jud Skavdahl, Principal Swisher, teacher representative Mr. Valenta and Superintendent Dr. Gies attended a Nebraska Department of Education sponsored training on The Standard Response Protocol (SRP) K-12. The training was designed to inform and educate school and community personnel on common actions and procedures for immediate response to school safety possibilities.

The Standard Response Protocol training was created from the "I Love You Guys" foundation. All materials are free of charge and readily available for schools. The SRP includes four actions. Lockout-"Secure the Perimeter," Lockdown-"Locks, Lights, Out of Sight," Evacuate-"To the Announced Location," and Shelter-"For a Hazard Using a Safety Strategy." Each action is followed by a directive. The training provided strategies and recommendations to keep students and staff safe during an emergency situation.

The desire of the State would be all schools in NE use this system. This allows all school staff, parents, students and community members to use the same process and common language which will help keep everyone safe at school sponsored activities.

Annual Safety and Security Inspection Review- each year Casper Ningen, Superintendent of Hemingford, conducts an inspection of our schools as required by the Nebraska Department of Education Rule 10, Section 004.01B4. The review is a three-step process. 1.) The written plan was

reviewed. 2.) A walk-through was conducted of each facility. 3.) A written report was compiled and presented to the school board.

This year's report was very favorable for all the facilities. This has been the norm for the past several years. We were congratulated for the planning and maintenance performed to keep the facilities safe and well maintained. The following items for each school were reported:

Harrison Elementary School-Strengths were noted for how well the school is maintained inside and out. Improvements were noted to perform concrete work on the front entrance crown. The concrete is breaking and the aesthetic value is lacking. The front entrance should be repaired before further damage occurs.

Sioux County High School-Commendations included the upgrades to the FCS room. The Ag/shop area was painted and brightened up. Underground sprinklers were installed on the grounds which enhances the curb appeal. The entrance to the school is welcoming, with couches and awards on display. Improvements were suggested to repair the worn and crumbling sidewalk on the east entrance to the school. It was also noted that the ramp leading to the weight room is too steep for safe use.

Pink School and Chalk Butte-both schools are well maintained with books and classrooms all neatly taken care of. A new merry-go-round was installed at Pink. Both attendance centers continue to display ongoing care and maintenance. The only suggestion was to have the fire extinguishers checked more than once each year. Custodians or faculty members need to check the gauge on the top of each extinguisher each month to ensure they are ready to be used if need be.

Closing Remarks by Superintendent, Dr. Brett Gies

With so much going in our busy lives and all the distractions of the craziness in the world today, it is easy to lose focus of what is most important to us. As school superintendent, this report was designed to be a reminder of all the good things we have at Sioux County Schools and provide an accurate picture of our school district.

My desire is for us to value and appreciate everything we have in our school system. Yes, we have challenges and areas we can improve, but at the same time, we have so much to be thankful for and appreciate that larger school systems and communities do not have or offer. As a leader, I try to narrow the focus and keep out the distractors which could lead us in a different direction. This year's motto reflects my belief that quality trumps quantity. It is more important to focus on what we put in rather than the time we put in. Effort and hard work trumps talent any day. We are a small school with big dreams of providing students with the best education possible.....because our kids deserve it.