

State of the District Address

January 19, 2009

Broken Bow Board of Education, Faculty, Staff, Administration, Students, Parents, Patrons, and other interested persons, I present my 9th Annual State of the District Address.

Overview

In any given time-frame, positive developments are counterbalanced by concerns. This holds true for any human endeavor, be it education, business, social issues, political cycles, or football and volleyball teams.

It is my experience, however, that all setbacks will have some gains and gains come with some setbacks. One could say that on one hand dark clouds have a silver lining or conversely, that silver clouds, too, sometimes have a dark lining.

Positive developments may be framed in terms of those steps, be it baby-steps or giant leaps, that move an organization, agency, or team towards a generally accepted state of improvement. Concerns, on the other hand, are those issues which while not necessarily

completely blocking attainment of goals, do in some way, impede the movement toward desired goals.

In this address, I present what I consider positive highlights in the move toward our collective goals and impediments obstructing our efforts since last January.

The Silver Clouds

I've identified four areas I consider to generally typify the many successes of 2008. These areas are Student Achievement, Technology Advancement, Expanded Higher Education Opportunities for Broken Bow Students, and Administrative Team.

Student Achievement

With the publication of the 10th Annual Report Card--2007-2008, the patrons of the Broken Bow Schools community can see tangible evidence of the work being conducted by the Board of Education and Broken Bow staff for our students. As we will go over this report in some detail following the conclusion of this address, I will point out only the obvious highlights of our students' achievement.

I. Achievement Scores on the Stanford 10

Achievement Tests are norm-referenced tests given to Broken Bow students in the 4th, 8th, and 11th grades. Norm-referenced tests are designed to compare the local student's score on a specific testing item to the scores from a sample of students from various locations throughout the United States. The sampling of scores are constructed so that in any group of students the expected outcome would be that 25% of the students would score in any one of the quartile scores. Therefore, we could expect that 25% of our students would score in the top quartile, 25% in the second quartile, 25% in the third quartile, and 25% bottom quartile. But, the results are much better than that. While we are not Lake Wobegon where all our children are above average, we consistently have a far greater share of our students in the top two quartiles than we would statistically expect to find. This finding is across all three grade levels and all subject areas.

II. ACT Scores

The ACT test is a voluntary test administered to students considering post-secondary

educational endeavors. Colleges and universities use these scores in various ways, but the original intent for the ACT was to assist post-secondary institutions in the placement of students in programs and courses. In recent times, to an increasing extent, academic scholarship values have been determined by the ACT score. Students try to attain the highest possible score on the ACT to gain placement in specific programs and increase the value of academic scholarships.

There are two items of interest with our ACT results:

1. In the past two years, for the first time in recent memory, we have a greater percentage of our students taking the college prep curriculum, referred to as the core curriculum, than we have students enrolled in a non-core curriculum. The core curriculum is: 4 years or more of English; 3 years or more of Social Studies; 3 years or more of Mathematics; and 3 years or more of Science.

This advancement in the number of students taking the core is remarkable in that we consistently, over the years, have around 80% of our students indicate they plan to attend college

while only about one-third of our students historically have taken the necessary curriculum to prepare themselves for success at college.

2. The average ACT score across all subjects and with both core and non-core students is consistently improved.

III. Nebraska Statewide Math, Reading, and Science Assessments.

Students in grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 11 are assessed in math, reading, and science. Writing samples are scored in grades 5, 8, and 11. The individual student scores are compared to the benchmarks established by the State of Nebraska and reported in terms of percentage of students at the benchmark (called proficient) or above.

In the 20 areas assessed in these 4 subjects, across the grades surveyed, we have a higher percentage of students scoring proficient or better in 17 cases than that of the statewide benchmarks.

The only areas where we didn't have a higher percentage of students scoring as proficient or

better than the statewide percentages were the 5th and 6th grade math and 6th grade reading.

IV. School District Accountability for the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act.

School District Accountability for NCLB is assessed in reading and math. Accountability is determined by assigning all students in grades 4, 8, and 11 into one of eight student groups, plus the overall group of students for that grade, making a total of nine student groups. These student groups are 5 racial categories, plus groups for students eligible for free and reduced lunches, special education students, and English language learners.

Each of these nine student groups have two scores: a performance score and a participation score. Scores are reported as met or not-met.

Broken Bow Schools 4th, 8th, and 11th graders met NCLB accountability for performance and participation in 105 of 108 possible scores. We didn't meet accountability in 4th grade math special education performance, 8th grade reading special education performance, and 8th grade math special education performance.

In the three areas in which we did not meet NCLB accountability requirements, we have two Federal laws in conflict with one another. Of course the one law is NCLB. The other law is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). NCLB mandates that all children will score at a prescribed level and IDEA mandates that children identified with special needs will be taught at the educationally appropriate level. These two requirements are mutually exclusive and are not resolvable within the stipulations of each mandate.

Certainly we have work to do. However, in the panoramic view, the vast majority of the work done in the classrooms at Broken Bow, day-in and day-out, certainly reflects well on our students as they go forward to whatever their calling following their matriculation at Broken Bow.

Technology Advancement

A trip down technology memory lane:

In 1995-96, Broken Bow Schools had 175 desktop computers and one IBM System 36 mid-size computer with 4 dedicated computer terminals for office use and 20 dedicated student

terminals in two student computer labs, one each at the High School and Middle School. There was no computer or telephone connectivity between and among the buildings. The district had one teacher assigned for 2 class periods a day to keep the 175 stand-alone units and the 24 dedicated terminals on the System 36 and associated hardware (e.g. modems and printers) operating. Neither dollars nor time was devoted to provide training for teachers on how to utilize this equipment in any form, let alone in instructional methods.

By the start of the 1998-99 school year, Broken Bow Schools had created the position of technology coordinator, eliminated the high maintenance IBM System 36, networked all the desktop computers (and inter-school telephone communications) in all the buildings into a fiber-optic network, and implemented a teacher training program that required all teachers at Broken Bow Schools to take 45 hours of standards-based instruction on how to make the computer a tool of instruction (as opposed to the object of instruction).

We were the envy of many schools. Our students were learning technology applications to

assist their learning of which most schools our size only dreamed. Ah, those were heady days.

Once again we have within our sights a new step in technological attainment to aid our instructional efforts. Only this time we are playing catch-up; the expectations on our students as they enter post-secondary educational institutions often requires a much more advanced technological background than what we currently provide our students.

When our students go off to higher educational endeavors, not only do they still have to overcome the typical trials of being far away from home and learning their way through and about new surroundings, which as many can attest is challenge enough, but often times our students have to learn a whole new paradigm surrounding the college or university use of technology. In its basic form, in this new paradigm students enroll in classes, receive class assignments, communicate with professors and classmates, conduct research and do their homework, turn in class assignments, and receive their grades and comments from professors: All on the computer. And this is not optional.

Students graduating from Broken Bow and moving on to higher academic pursuits, no matter their academic preparation, start behind the eight-ball in competition with their fellow students.

We can move our graduates from this woeful starting position by implementing a 1:1 computing initiative.

The Program/Americanism/Curriculum/Technology Team of the Broken Bow Board of Education, along with the Technology Committee of the Broken Bow School Improvement Team, is investigating the best way to bring 1:1 computing to Broken Bow.

1:1 computing is a concept that changes the instructional paradigm from that of a teacher-focused teaching model to that of a student-centered learning model. In simplified terms, the driving force in this model is teachers establishing the learning outcome and providing multiple routes to achieve the outcome. The students then use the technological power of the computer and cybersources to achieve and document their arrival at the outcome. In other words, it empowers student learning by giving

students the channels and tools to reach information they need to achieve the outcome through technology commonly available to them outside the typical school day: Anywhere and Anytime.

With this initiative, not only do we prepare our graduates to start college on par with other students in terms of technological experience, we have the added benefit of expanded learning resources at the high school level.

As is typical of Broken Bow Schools, we are thoroughly investigating the best way to implement the initiative with one eye on the goal of 1:1 learning and the other eye on prudent fiscal planning. This is an exciting prospect for our students and one that will require a multi-year implementation plan.

Expanded Higher Education Opportunities for Broken Bow Students

Through our collaboration with Mid-Plains Community College, students have an increased opportunity to earn college credit while attending school at Broken Bow. Though by no means a new program, new course offerings were added this year to the previously available options. It is

now possible for high school students to earn up to 20 college credits during the school day while simultaneously earning high school credit.

Also new this year is the availability of on-line college credit classes during the school day. Though students don't earn high school credits in these courses, for some, it is more productive to take these on-line college classes instead of high school electives that are not of particular individual interest.

Just think. It is possible for a Broken Bow graduate to enter college as a sophomore. This is an excellent opportunity for students who either want to get finished with college a year earlier than most others in their cohort or want to save the expense of an extra year.

Administrative Team

Broken Bow Schools hired two new administrators this past year. These two new administrators replaced long-time staffers who took with them much wisdom and experience. Ms. Kim Jonas, Elementary Principal (supervising 4 attendance centers) and Mr. Ryan Hogue, Secondary Assistant Principal and

Activities Director, both bring fresh eyes to their positions.

As I'm sure you will hear next month in more detail, Ms. Jonas quickly established positive supervisory relationships with her staff. She also established in-house staff development time by altering the elementary duty day, sought new funding sources through her intimate knowledge of federal funds streams, and has dealt nimbly with unexpected Federal funding, student enrollment, and other student-oriented issues which have arisen this year.

Mr. Hogue also rapidly developed relationships with his staff, including activity coaches and sponsors. In addition, within his first month, Mr. Hogue established an annual fund-raising golf tournament and also brought a fresh perspective on the lighting issue at Mark Russell Field. As you will hear later this evening in the business portion of the meeting, the new lights at Mark Russell field are very nearly a reality. Mr. Hogue will elaborate in greater detail an accounting of his pursuits in his annual report at the May Board of Education meeting.

The Dark Clouds

It seems that often the dark clouds remain very much the same from year to year. School finance is the dark cloud that seems to hover over us annually. A tangential component to the financial issue is the mandate-rich environment existing in our legislative bodies, be it Federal or State. I will briefly cover some of the concerns regarding finances and mandates which we have in front of us.

School Finance

With the bold action of the most recently past Board of Education, we were able to put the immediate cash-flow crisis of the district on hold. The board authorized the issuance of a bond to pay insurance premiums. The statutory vehicle providing this bond had been in existence since the levy lids were implemented in the mid-1990's. This allowed any political sub-division to bridge short-term financial problems by issuing bonds to pay insurance premiums, thereby giving the governing body of the sub-division a little wriggle room for a period up to five years. This provision gave the political sub-division time

to work through their problems without making hasty, short-sighted decisions.

This statute was repealed by this past legislature.

Other Mandates

I. Testing

The State of Nebraska for years led the nation in instructional-based assessments. Broken Bow Schools, and every other school district in the State, spent thousands of dollars developing assessments that met the Federal requirements of NCLB and yet had the added bonus of guiding instruction.

This past legislature removed that assessment model and replaced it with the old drill-and-kill testing of which many other states are trying to rid themselves. The experience in the other states using these types of test is that curriculum is narrowed to that of what is tested at the expense of classes like band, chorus, history, foreign languages, business, and physical education. Some school districts have even eliminated recess for elementary students so that more time can be spent in test preparation.

Oh yes. The State money that supported the instructional-based assessment system, that not only directly benefited our students but indirectly benefited the local economy, is now going to go to a company located somewhere else, to put the new testing system in place.

There is one erstwhile "benefit" to this new testing system: The Nebraska Department of Education will now annually release a list of schools in rank order of the results of the tests.

II. Transportation

A very real possibility in this legislative session is a requirement for seatbelts on yellow school buses. The way the proposed legislation looks today is that yellow buses, when replaced in a school fleet, will be required to provide factory installed seatbelts on the replacement bus. Estimates for the increase in the cost of a yellow bus with seatbelts are in the \$15,000 range. Another issue here is that we would be required to buy new buses; historically Broken Bow has purchased used buses to save money.

Rules 91 and 92 were rewritten by the Nebraska Department of Education, approved by The State Board of Education, the Governor, and

Attorney General, and implemented this past year. Among the provisions in the revised rules was the sunset, beginning in June of 2011, on the 15-passenger vans. These vans are used as the mid-sized vehicle in student transportation. We have three such vans which will not be allowed to transport students under any circumstances. In order to transport smaller groups of students we will be required to buy an increased number of smaller passenger vehicles to transport the same number of students or buy larger vehicles requiring the driver to possess Commercial Driver Licenses.

All this to say, within two years, we will be required to spend additional funds for vehicles, and possibly, drivers.

Conclusion

As presented in this 9th Annual State of the District Address, many important steps forward were made in 2008 from which future generations of Broken Bow students will benefit. The continuing challenges before us regarding school finance and unfunded legislative mandates will remain significant to the educational health of our students. Our task, yours and mine, is to remain involved and be

strong as we seek to make this year, and the years to come, the best our limited resources may allow.

The accomplishments and current projects of Broken Bow Schools are impressive. The Broken Bow staff involved in these tasks are highly trained, highly motivated, and highly prized. Let us recommit ourselves to continuing the Broken Bow tradition of hard work in the trenches so that our students may attain their dreams.

Ad Astra Per Aspra. To the stars through difficulty.