

State of the District Address January 16, 2006

Broken Bow Board of Education, Faculty, Staff, Administration, Students, Parents, Patrons, and other interested parties, I present my 5th Annual State of the District Address.

I believe this to be a year for optimism.

The financial picture of the State of Nebraska is vastly improved over that of the recent past. There are no legislative bombs looming on the federal horizon with anywhere near the megatonnage of the reauthorization of the elementary and secondary schools act known as No Child Left Behind Act. There are some issues of local importance and concern with which we will have to contend, but that is for later in this address. There is much to celebrate locally with some of the accomplishments of the past year.

Accomplishments

Broken Bow Alternative High School

After nine years of discussion, fits, starts, delays, and derailments, the alternative high school moved into the realm of reality. In October of 2004, the Broken Bow Board of Education gave approval to the concept of an alternative high school. The Curriculum Having Opportunities for Individual Choices in Education program (CHOICE) has the general goal of accomplishing virtually the same educational/learning goals as the traditional high school, but in a vastly different manner for those students who don't particularly profit in the traditional one hundred seventy-something school day calendar, having seven or eight different teachers each day working in forty-four minute periods with up to sometimes twenty or thirty-plus students in some classes. Instead, this program offers students who are experiencing difficulty succeeding in the traditional environment a viable opportunity for success. As of this past August, no longer do we, as a school and as a community let young people drift away from a high school education. With the CHOICE program, we have a new tool in our tool kit, one that has shown promise in other schools where implemented. And now, after its first semester of operation in Broken Bow, 10 students applied for admission and were enrolled in the program. Of these 10 students, 2 graduated last November, students who were unlikely to have earned a diploma without this program. Currently there are 8 students enrolled in the CHOICE program with 3 additional inquiries. There are 13 students working on credit recovery with 3 additional students indicating interest yet this semester.

This program is one of the few programs developed in recent years that is a stand-alone program for Broken Bow Public Schools. Broken Bow is the sole sponsor of this program.

Standards Based Grading

Last August, the entire faculty of Broken Bow Schools attended a workshop on standards, or performance, based grading. This concept is designed to evaluate what students know based on objective criteria. A hand-in-glove approach to grading in this standards-based era of educational excellence, these grading practices are probably the most far-reaching development in grading practices since grades were developed.

Currently a committee of teachers is working to develop the recommended grading policy for the district. A pilot project, which is comprised of a few teachers who have implemented the basics of this practice into the development of their grades, indicates that already this practice shows real promise in conveying to parents and students a more complete picture of what the students know and can do.

Other concepts to be fleshed out during this committee's development phase, are how to communicate the student's character and behavior, putting a stronger emphasis on assessments, projects, and performances, and separating personal behavior and academic performance.

I mention something about this process that is of particular note: This is a teacher-discovered, teacher-led initiative. Those closest to the students, the teachers, sought a better way to communicate with students and parents. Following the August workshops, this committee of teachers has met, on their own time, to craft this policy. This is but one example of the quality of the staff at Broken Bow Schools.

Middle School Reading Program

Also in this past year, another teacher led project is taking form. This project is a reading program for struggling middle school readers. Traditionally, a vast investment is made in helping struggling readers in the elementary levels. Here at Broken Bow, we implemented a phonics based reading program about 6 years ago. Three years ago in conjunction with Anselmo-Merna Schools, we applied for and received a major Federal grant which reinforced our phonics program with a prescriptive reading program. These projects both have helped our younger students to become stronger readers. However, after a student leaves the elementary levels, there is no formal reading program to continue assistance to the struggling readers.

By next year we should be in a pilot year of a project to address this shortcoming. Again, through the efforts of a team of dedicated teachers, a program to identify and provide actual instruction in reading to students in the middle grades should be in place.

PTA Playground Project

After a few years of getting their feet on the ground, the relatively new Parent/Teachers Association undertook a major project that will come to fruition this summer. I received a report that the new equipment for the playground at Custer Elementary is set to be ordered. Financing for the equipment in this project came entirely from non-tax sources. This hardworking PTA group identified the area in which the school needed assistance,

planned and executed fund raising activities, applied for grants, and researched the various types of playground equipment.

Our maintenance crew has scheduled the removal of the old equipment and is charged with leading the installation of the new equipment. This is planned to be completed in time for the start of school next August.

Essential Finance Planning Initiative

The Board of Education has been active this past year as well. One of the goals of this Board has been to increase and enhance the communication of school issues and ideas with the public. A major initiative being undertaken this year is Essential Finance Planning.

Facilitated by Marge Beatty, the Educational Service Unit #16 Administrator, this program is vast in its scope: Virtually anyone in the Broken Bow community who has an interest gets to see and comment on essentially every aspect of Broken Bow Schools. This group, which numbers around 30, has met twice now and has practically unlimited access to the workings of the district.

Most recently, the group performed environmental scans of the district's political, social, economic, and education horizons.

Commissioner of Education

This March, Dr. Doug Christensen, Commissioner of Education, Nebraska Department of Education, is returning to Broken Bow Public Schools. This return visit is a follow-up to the initial appointment he had with us in the fall semester of 2004. The reception he received here, along with the quality of work being conducted here, are the inducements for him to return. When he was here before, he talked about a shift in the paradigm to put the work conducted by teachers in the classroom the focus of our efforts. This time, Dr. Christensen plans to bring his department heads to Broken Bow so that we have direct access to his managers and so that his managers hear first-hand of the actual work being conducted in the field.

I think you can sense the quality and quantity of initiatives under consideration, in planning, underway, or accomplished at Broken Bow Schools since my last report. However, the five mentioned above are but representative of the total number of projects. There has been a major upgrade in security cameras at the High School I Middle School complex, the Middle School Science Classroom and Lab were moved into the newly remodeled and modern rooms, and our Early Childhood Special Education program came into state compliance with the addition of necessary fencing at North Park. There are two vocational projects in the planning: Mecatronics, a collaboration with Central Community College, our business community and the school to show our students that there are good paying, highly challenging jobs here in Broken

Bow, and a new job shadowing project designed to augment the career day already sponsored.

There is always something going on at the school. I think all interested parties can take a measure of satisfaction about the quality of the initiatives undertaken by our Board of Education, faculty, and staff.

Challenges

Current Facilities

I suppose that by this time, the 5th Annual State of the District Address, the audience is tiring of hearing about the shortcomings of our facilities. However, as I mentioned in most of my past reports, facility issues don't go away. School Buildings are just like homes and business buildings. They require constant maintenance, and from time-to-time they need major renovations or replacement as the demands on the facilities change.

At this point I will recap some of the issues identified over the past State of the District Addresses to refresh our collective memories on our facility issues.

At North Park, the building is settling and shifting. This is taking its toll on the ceiling, walls, foundation, and sidewalks. The roofing membrane which is to keep water out of the building was at the end of its life-expectancy 10 years ago. We've babied it and pampered it long past what anyone could have ever really expected from it, but it has now all but ceased to keep water out of the facility. It needs replaced now, it can be put off no longer.

The North Park boiler and steam system is old and inefficient, which is compounded by a ceiling that has an insulation factor of R3. The electrical service is maximized, meaning that we are hampered in this age of electronic wizardry. We just cannot add electrical demands in that building without a major upgrade in electrical service.

Custer also has an aging boiler and steam system. The windows, replaced some time ago, are past their life-expectancy and are beginning to crack and separate. They will need renovated by the summer of 2007.

The middle school has proven to be a versatile and venerable old building. The safety issues of unmonitored entryways have been addressed with the installation of the security cameras. While we don't have someone available to monitor security cameras in real-time, we do at least have the capability to replay hallway activity to review incidents reported to the office. Also, with the addition of the Behavior Self-Contained Classroom which is going into the Middle School this summer, this building has once again proven to be adaptable far beyond its design capabilities.

The High School roof is eight years past its life expectancy. While patching of the leaks continues, it is a losing proposition. The leaks appear faster than we can find and repair them.

In all of our buildings. I continue to field concerns from parents and staff about the heat during August, September, May, and sometimes even in April. In each of my past State of District Addresses, I discussed the discrepancy between how adults choose to conduct their business in airconditioned environments but require our children to conduct theirs in stifling heat.

District-wide we are also concerned about our current key system. The current system, the use of actual keys with key cores in each lock, requires an extensive, to say nothing of expensive, re-coring process if a key is lost or stolen. We are looking for a cost-effective replacement system that reduces this expense in the event of a missing key.

Legislative Bill 126

A concern facing Broken Bow Public Schools and all its citizens is LB 126. This bill effectively eliminated the independent status of Class I, or elementary-only school districts, and attached these former elementary districts to Class II, III, IV, or V school districts. There is also a provision regarding Class VI, or high school only districts, but that is not applicable in our situation.

While there is a court challenge to the immediate implementation of this bill, it currently is the law of the land, and as such, prudence requires plans based on the assumption that there will be no change to the law or its implementation date. As such, several issues come before the Broken Bow School District.

Facilities

Next year, Broken Bow will have two additional school buildings in which school will be held. These two school buildings are Berwyn and Round Hill. Berwyn is about 7 miles from here and Round Hill is about 16 miles away. Broken Bow, as of June 15, 2006, will assume all costs associated with those facilities. Out of our general fund, we will pay for all maintenance and necessary renovations. We will be responsible for all safety plan upgrades.

Curriculum

While we have tried over the years to include the Class I's in our curriculum planning, but that notwithstanding, we now will be absolutely responsible for assuring that their curriculum is our curriculum, that their assessments are our assessments, and that their standards are our standards. This may require new textbook purchases as well as consumable materials. These teachers and students will need to be brought into the Reading First Grant in both training and testing.

Also, we need to decide about elementary physical education and music. There is no justifiable rationale to provide those classes for students at North Park and Custer and not for Berwyn and Round Hill. Also, according the accreditation rules, Rule 10, we must provide an elementary counselor for these schools.

Remember, the students attending the facilities after June 15 are Broken Bow Public Schools students, they are no longer the responsibility of just the people living in the area.

Teachers

The teachers at these two buildings are on a lower salary scale than the teachers at Broken Bow, but not for long. After June 15th, these teachers will see a fairly sizable pay raise along with health insurance and other benefits covered in the negotiated agreement between the Broken Bow Educators Association and the Broken Bow Board of Education.

Transportation

State law requires school districts to provide transportation or mileage reimbursements for students living 4 miles or more from their attendance center. While transportation is a state aid issue, we will be required to either provide the transportation or pay the mileage (and be reimbursed the following year).

Conclusion

Our accomplishments and current projects are impressive, quite possibly one of the most impressive of all the years I've had the honor and privilege of being your superintendent. And that would be quite a statement considering the accomplishments over the past 11 years. As usual, our plate remains full. It seems as though as soon as we clear one portion from our plate, a heaping serving or two of some other delectable goodie replaces it.

We can only devour these servings because we have a staff that is composed of ravenously hungry professionals. Because after all, it doesn't matter what the job is. If the people performing the tasks are highly trained, highly motivated, and highly prized, the product will be highly treasured.

(Delivered to the Broken Bow Public Schools Board of Education on January 16, 2006 by Dr. Timothy B. Shafer, Superintendent)