

SCHOOL DISTRICT OF SEWARD FALL 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.



The Other Half of Education – From the Superintendent

The Nebraska School Activities Association uses the phrase “the other half of education” as they refer to the role school activities play in the education of students. I wholeheartedly believe that to be true. I’ve been around Seward long enough now that most of you have probably heard me say, or read in another newsletter, that there are many lessons to learn in school—many of them not found in textbooks.

Extracurricular activities provide opportunities to teach many of those lessons to our students. They provide our students opportunities to experience what life is really like. They learn about work ethic, dedication, perseverance, leadership, teamwork, success, preparation, execution, communication, sportsmanship and competition. They also experience other life lessons such as disappointment, disagreement, defeat, pain, and not always getting what they want. Sometimes they lose, they don’t perform well, or they struggle with others on the team.

We all know these are valuable lessons even though some are more enjoyable to watch your children experience than others. Sometimes as parents I think we get so wrapped up in winning that we forget the many other valuable reasons for school activities. I know how much we want our children to win, but I do believe success can be measured in more than wins and losses. We need to remind ourselves that even if we aren’t winning every game, our children are learning valuable skills that will benefit them for a lifetime. Believe me, I’m a parent of three grown children myself and they were very involved in Nebraska High School Activities. All three of my children were decent in the activities in which they participated and they had dedicated coaches and sponsors, but no state championship medals or state championship trophies. They didn’t start every game, and they didn’t always get to play, but they did learn lessons about life. They made mistakes along the way, but lessons were learned from those mistakes, and I know all three of my children are better off today for having participated. I really do believe school activities are an essential part of what we do to educate our children. They really are “the other half of education” even though watching our children learn some of those lessons can be painful for us as parents.

Be supportive, be positive, and to steal Mr. Schwartz’s phrase....be classy! Enjoy the opportunities you have as parents to watch your children compete and perform. Believe me, in the blink of an eye your children will be grown and into the real world where these experiences will be of great value.

Did you know?

During the 2013-2014 school year the high school NSAA activity with the largest participation numbers was instrumental/vocal music with 29,061 participants. In terms of athletic activities, in the girls’ sports, volleyball had the most participants with 7,111 and in the boys’ sports, football had the most participants with 13,195.

Public Service – From the Superintendent

We all are aware of the quote from John F. Kennedy, “My fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.” What meaningful words. We have the opportunity to teach our students, and you to teach your children, another important lesson in life.

For a number of years students at Seward High School have had a graduation requirement that they complete 30 hours of volunteer service within their communities. We have recently been discussing what we can do as a school district to improve our lessons on serving our communities, state, and so on. When we look at opportunities to improve, I think it’s important to understand what we are doing, and when I really look at how involved our students are, I’m amazed. They do much to benefit others—I’m not saying we can’t do more.

The Elementary Character Council is leading a drive over the next few weeks for blankets, coats, hats, mittens, warm clothing, and food. They also raised over \$1,200.00 last spring for Relay for Life.

The Middle School Builders Club donates money to UNICEF, they buy gifts for families through the Adopt-a-Family program over the holidays. They help serve pancakes/waffles at the Kiwanis Pancake Feed, and sometimes help Kiwanis with their Spring Clean-up. Builders Club has also raised money to help various students, or student’s families when in need, and they organized the recycling program at the middle school using some of their money to buy recycling items such as bins for each classroom.

At the high school, the FCCLA students regularly help at the Lincoln City Mission. The FFA holds a canned food drive. Key Club students helped with Parade of Flags. FCCLA conducts breast cancer awareness activities. Band members donate time during the summer and during the year for music performances. High school students also visit retirement homes, and they conduct a blood drive each year for the blood bank.

I know I’m missing some activities, but my point is that many of our students are actively engaged in our communities and I can say the same for our staff. We have staff members who belong to service organizations that help serve in our communities. Staff members also help raise money for needy families, adoption agencies, and Blue Valley/CASA. They also help our students organize their community service activities.

I’m proud of our students and staff who give their time selflessly for others. It’s nice to know that we are giving back. Thank you!

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 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.

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 Russ Wissing at Seward High School.

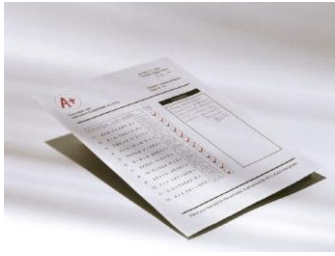
In the event school is canceled or dismissed early, typically all activity and athletic practices will be canceled on those days and the school buildings will be closed. If we decide not to cancel school and parents want their children to come home immediately after school, parents have the right to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



BEHAVIOR EXPECTATIONS ON THE SCHOOL BUS

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.

STATE REPORT CARD



Each year the Nebraska Department of Education gathers school data and provides a summary via their “State of the Schools Report”. The 2013-14 report has just been posted on their website at <http://reportcard.education.ne.gov/Search/DistrictSearch.aspx> and is available to the public. You can review data for the entire state or individual school districts by clicking on the corresponding links provided at the above website.

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 1, 2014, Seward County had 29 sex offenders registered with 12 living in our school district. Butler County had 12 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.

SCHOOL BOARD NEWS

School Board Appreciation Week is January 18-24. We would like to thank all of our school board members for their volunteer service to our school, communities, and students.

We would also like to thank Pam Williams for her 8 years of service on our school board. Pam has been a great supporter of our school and has brought value to our discussions about many educational issues. Thank you Pam!

We also have two new board members joining our team. Curt Sherman actually joined the school board by appointment when Tim Alvarez resigned this past summer. His name was already on the ballot for the pending board election, so we just talked him into starting his term early. Curt is the Director of Strategic Initiatives and Investments at Concordia University.

Scott Pekarek is returning to the board after a 4 year break. Mr. Pekarek is a local businessman and works as a Crew Leader Network and Cable Technician for Lincoln Electric System.

We also welcome Lydia Stafford, Senior at Seward High School, as our Student Board Member for 2014-2015. High school seniors who are interested in becoming the student representative on the board of education may apply and the representative is selected by the principal along with an advisory group. This student representative provides a unique perspective for board meeting discussions.

Seward Public School Board Policy states that the purposes for adding a student board of

education member are:

1. To increase leadership opportunities for all students.
2. To provide student input and share common concerns and ideas.
3. To advise the Superintendent and/or the board of education on matters of concern related to student rights and responsibilities and/or decision on Board Policies which may be of interest to students.

2014-2015 School District of Seward – BUDGET



During the September 8, 2014 Board of Education meeting, the 2014-2015 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 2014-2015 fiscal year was set at \$20,048,149 which compares to \$19,490,360 budgeted in the General Fund for 2013-2014. This represents an increase of 2.9% 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 \$20,048,149 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 during this fiscal year will be \$350,863 which is down \$11,195 from the previous year. The valuation of the property in our school district increased by \$204,270,278 or 17.23%.

The local property tax asking for “all funds” increased by \$391,078 which was a 2.8% increase. We are aware that we are asking for more local property tax money even though our tax levies decreased due to the large 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 over 14 cents.

2013-2014/2014-2015 Levy/Tax Asking Comparison

Fund	2013-14 Levy	2013-2014 Tax Request	2014-15 Levy	2014-2015 Tax Request	Levy Change	Tax Asking Change
General	\$ 1.008407	\$ 11,953,292.81	\$ 0.862678	\$ 11,988,067.06	\$ 0.145729)	\$ 34,774
Bonds - H.S.	\$ 0.033014	\$ 391,336.62	\$ 0.025186	\$ 350,000.00	\$(0.007828)	\$(41,337)
Bonds - M.S.	\$ 0.104044	\$ 1,233,296.70	\$ 0.098903	\$ 1,374,388.87	\$(0.005141)	\$141,092
Special Building			\$ 0.020000	\$ 277,926.89	\$ 0.020000	\$277,927
Qualified Capital	\$ 0.014160	\$ 167,843.43	\$ 0.010540	\$ 146,464.65	\$(0.003620)	\$(21,379)
Total	\$1.159625	\$13,745,769.56	\$ 1.017307	\$ 14,136,847.47	\$(0.142318)	\$391,078

ENROLLMENT SUMMARY

Enrollment Summary as of September, 2014

Elementary

K = 82

Middle School

High School

1 = 97

5 = 126

9 = 131

2 = 92

6 = 103

10 = 125

3 = 95

7 = 104

11 = 126

4 = 95

8 = 84

12 = 133

Elem Total = 461

Mid. Total = 417

High Total = 515

Total K-12 = 1,393

HISTORIC ENROLLMENT

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

September of 2008 = SES-409, SMS-415, SHS-491, Total-1,315