

OGALLALA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), was passed in 1965 during the Lyndon B. Johnson administration as part of the War on Poverty. The act emphasized equal access to education, established high standards and accountability, and authorized federally funded education programs administered by individual states. Congress amended ESEA in 2002 and reauthorized it as the No child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. The law was scheduled to be reauthorized in 2007; to date congress has not taken the necessary steps to update this law.

When states and districts agree to accept federal funds, there are strings attached. Attached to NCLB Title I funding is the stipulation to have statewide assessments and adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) decisions for every public school in the state. Under NCLB, the proficiency goal for school year 2013-14 for Reading and Mathematics assessments was set at 100%. According to the NCLB rules, every student—regardless of disabilities, English language proficiency, or other life-impacting circumstances—must be proficient in reading and math as measured by state assessments. Because of this unrealistic goal, a number of Nebraska schools will be mislabeled as *Not Met* or *In Need of Improvement*.

The Nebraska Department of Education does not agree with the current federal policy. I do not believe that all our schools are low performing. In fact, the U. S. Department of Education has granted waivers from the unrealistic expectations of NCLB. Common sense tells us that one child in one grade in one subject area scoring just below a “proficiency cut score” should not brand an entire school community as failing. Yet that is exactly what has happened under NCLB. As a result of this faulty logic, some schools or districts in Nebraska have not met the NCLB requirement for the 2013-14 school year.

Nebraska educators are committed to each and every young person reaching his or her full potential and we are proud of the significant academic progress of our students. While not all students have reached proficiency, the use of targeted resources to assist struggling students and schools has had an impact which is seen in performance data not taken into account by NCLB. Our students, staff members, and schools are not failures. By many measure, they are demonstrating unprecedented levels of achievement. We continue to strive for improvement and excellence in our public schools.

Nebraska’s new commissioner of education, Matthew Blomstedt, made it very clear what he thinks about those results in a letter that he has asked all Nebraska schools to send to parents: “The Nebraska Department of Education does not agree with current federal (education) policy.”
Commissioner Matt Blomstedt

Based on Nebraska state testing results the Ogallala School District was identified by the NDE as a district in need of improvement for the 2013-14 school year. A district is identified for improvement if it meets this criterion:

- Does not make AYP in West 5th, Progress and Prairie View for two consecutive years in either content area of math or reading, considering all eligible student subgroups.

To be removed from the district improvement status, the district must meet the grade span achievement standards for two consecutive years.

The Ogallala Public Schools is dedicated to providing all students with a quality education that prepares them to be career and college ready. Evidence of our commitment to education is shown in the academic growth for both reading and mathematics as documented on the 2012-13 assessment results. Ogallala Public Schools improved the percent of students proficient in 12 student groups in reading and 11 student groups in math. If you would like to compare achievement scores in the district to others across the state, you may access the information on the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) State of the Schools Report at <http://reportcard.education.ne.gov>.

As a Title 1 district identified in need of improvement, Ogallala Public Schools is required to communicate the district improvement plan strategies specifically addressing the teaching and learning needs of low-achieving students. The goals and strategies identified in the plan intentionally focus on optimizing instruction for all learners using researched based practices with on-going professional learning for staff.

You are encouraged to contact the district office for further information on any of these requirements and to find out how you can become involved in school improvement efforts. An important part of this effort involves parental involvement and support. Parents/guardians and students can monitor progress (grades 6-12) by registering for and using Infinite Campus. Participating in parent/teacher conferences, attending parent/family nights and providing “at home” strategies to support reading and math learning are also key to supporting the home/school partnership.

We will continue to communicate with you throughout the year regarding the school improvement efforts underway and hope you will join us in supporting our students and teachers as we work toward reaching our goals for next year.

Please call if you have additional questions about any details.

Sincerely

Carl Dietz, Superintendent Ogallala Public School