

District works on multiple challenges

By Pat Schiefen

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The Goodland School District plans to step up to the plate to meet its challenges, which include declining enrollment, an excess of buildings and being on "improvement" status under the No Child Left Behind Law for student's lack of progress in reading.

On the plus side, the district has \$664,000 in its capital outlay fund, \$152,659 in grants for implementing a programs to get the school off of improvement – including use of the Multi-Tiered System of Support at Grant Junior High, and instruction suited to each student at the high school – and a recently equipped Technology Rich Classroom at the Central Elementary School.

The district has been on improvement for year and has a year left, said Superintendent Shelly Angelos. The district and each of the schools made "annual yearly progress" as required under the last year. To be placed on improvement status, the district had failed to meet progress goals for two years in a row; to get off it needs to meet two years of progress goals.

With a decline in enrollment equalling about one classroom per year since 2003, the district wound up with more buildings than it needs, according to a study by Keith Blackburn of Horst, Terrill and Karst Architect of Topeka done in February.

The enrollment has steadily decreased since

the mid 1970s. The head count was at 869 last fall but was down to 853 by February. The count for the year just starting, however, was back up to 874. In 2003, the head count on Sept. 20 was 966, but by 2007 it was down to 886. The head count does not include 3- and 4-year-olds in preschool, special education or "unclassified" students in special programs. The numbers are from the Kansas Department of Education's website.

Blackburn recommended the district close Grant and move junior high students to the high school. He concluded that the current high school is oversized and not being used efficiently.

The drawback to just moving the junior high students with no renovations is that the younger students would not always be together and have a separate identity, his report said. The move could have been done as soon as this fall, but the school board put off a decision.

The study said the three grade schools are close to housing maximum numbers but that could change with declining population. The district will need to keep an eye on those numbers, the report said. Another option, Blackburn said, could include closing one of the grade schools and moving the district offices to that building. The school board was concerned that moving this year would not give the staff enough time to plan. The other building being considered for closing was Central.

Board President Jane Philbrick acknowl-



School
District

Goodland

Enrollment fall 2009 — 874
Plus/Minus from 2008 — plus 5
Trend — down 92 since fall 2003.

district is at 29.18 percent, Angelos said.

The board raised the budget this spring but did not want to max out the local option budget. Board members acknowledged that districts were being pushed to the limit as the cash-strapped state cuts its education budget.

The total budget for the district was almost \$12 million several years ago and \$7 million for the last school year, Angelos said. The proposed budget for this school year is \$6,667,393 due to less state aid, fewer students and a loss of about \$2 million in property valuation, according to county appraiser.

She said the district should be all right this year, but it will be hard to withstand any more cuts from the state in the next budget.

On the technology side, the district has a new plan and was awarded a Technology Rich Classroom grant in partnership with the Grinnell School District. Angelos said all the equipment has been ordered and will be ready to go this fall. The grant, available only to districts on improvement, gives them money for computers, iPods, computer projectors, digital cameras and teacher training. It aims to immerse technology into the curriculum. There are only seven grants given statewide each year, said Superintendent Angelos.

Goodland High School has a 21st Century Skills class where each student has their own laptop. The district did an upgrade in its servers and cable to speed Internet access and communication among schools.

edges that a decision needs to be made this year. The board realizes that it needs to close at least one building and possibly another, she said.

Finances are a big concern and uncertainty about the state meeting its financial commitments to Kansas education is "scary," said Superintendent Shelly Angelos.

The board could raise the district's local option budget to the limit, said Angelos. With declining enrollment and property valuation, though, that number gets smaller all the time.

The local option budget is tax money raised by the school district through a property tax levy. The maximum amount, 30 percent of the general fund, is set by the state. The Goodland

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Students at the Gem School posed for a photo on the steps of the school building in 1922. Even though the building, built in 1920, is still there, the school was closed in 1966. The students were split between the Colby School District and the newly-created Golden Plains District.

—Prairie Museum of Art and History

Old school falls apart after closing

A lonely brick building that became a victim of vandals, overgrown with weeds and shattered windows, is all that is left of what was once a proud and vibrant school, the center of activity for School District No. 33 in Gem.

Classes first began in 1885 in the Gem area, and like other rural areas, larger schools were built to accommodate more students.

In 1920, the present brick building opened, and the district graduated fairly consistent number each year. After World War II, though, it followed the trend of dwindling population of rural areas and eventually closed in 1966 during a statewide move for consolidation.

The district served mostly rural students with buses to get them to and from their daily studies.

Sports teams, mainly basketball, were supported by the entire community, and although their teams were small, their spirit was big. There were times when the Gem Lady Tigers had seven girls out for basket ball, but that didn't dampen their spirit for the game.

The school and community spirit today still lives big in the hearts of an older generation of "Gemites" who have fond memories of a school that once ruled the town.



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