

Schools here get high marks from state

Test scores, attendance, success all good

By KIMBERLY BRANDT
Oberlin schools score above the state average in most areas and the percentage of kids who graduate from high school is high, building reports prepared by the state Department of Education show.

Oberlin Elementary School Principal Duane Dorshorst showed graphs which demonstrated the differences between kids here and the state average at the last school board meeting.

In 2000, the graph showed that 95.9 percent of Oberlin students graduated compared to the state average of 83.7 percent. The high school had a low percentage of violent acts by students, only .4 percent compared to 1.7 percent statewide. Mr. Dorshorst said that incident here was from a bomb threat at the beginning of last year.

Scores in classes at the high school were above the state average for the most part, with 87.2 percent passing advanced science courses compared to 70.3 percent statewide. He said that anything past biology is considered an advanced course.

In advanced math courses, though, students are below the state average at 55.3 percent compared to 69.1 for the state. High School Principal Gordon Matson said not that many kids are taking advanced math classes, especially with the newer math lab that is offered at the school.

The reports showed that there were 267 students at the high school last year with 52 percent boys and 48 girls. They had an attendance rate of 94.9 percent, which Mr. Dorshorst said isn't unusual. The state average is 93.6.

A number which is low throughout the state, but extremely low here is the drop-out rate. In the state it is 3.1 percent but in Oberlin, it is .4 of one percent.

Students here have high test scores, including the junior class, which was assessed for English. Of the class, 11.4 percent scored in the advanced range to the state's 6 percent, and only 3 percent in the unsatisfactory range to the state's 12.4 percent.

Scores for other classes and subjects were similar, with the percentage of advanced and proficient percentages higher than the unsatisfactory and basic numbers. Principal Matson said he thought the school was doing very well overall.

"We are pretty much on track," he (Please see SCORES on Page 10A)

Board wants to push bonds ahead

The Oberlin School Board agreed at a special meeting Monday night to try for a bond issue which includes \$4.8 million worth of work at the grade school and some work at the high school, but it isn't sure what.

The work at the grade school will include an elevator, at least two classrooms, a media center-library on the second floor and heating, ventilating and air conditioning.

At the high school, the board asked the architects to bring in an engineer to look at the electrical wiring before it make any decisions. Members said they want to find where the problem spots in the wiring are.

The board was trying to get the proposed bond issue below the \$6 million figure instead of \$7.38 million where it was when the issue was tabled at the last meeting.

This figure doesn't include work that will be done with capital outlay property tax money, which Superintendent Duane Steele said the district may try to start fairly soon.

Since the beginning of the school year, the board has been working on plans for renovation at the schools, which

haven't had any major work since 1965.

"The board hasn't lost its intention on addressing the infrastructure," said Superintendent Steele before the meeting.

As part of the plan, the board arranged a blue ribbon committee including people from the community. Superintendent Steele said that he looked for members who weren't "yes" people and said he hoped that those who didn't support the project would change their minds and help sell the bond issue.

That committee met for the first time Jan. 2, and Superintendent Steele said they are working on getting the correct information for the bond project so that they can get information out to everyone and start to promote the project.

By February, he said, the board will be looking at a resolution again and then it may try for a June special election. Another special meeting is planned at 7:30 p.m. on Monday, Feb. 5, at the district office.

Telethon set to get \$12,000

Organizers hope to match record from 2000's event

By KIMBERLY BRANDT
The seventh annual Seeds of Hope Telethon will start at 1 p.m. on Saturday, Feb. 3, at The Gateway complete with food, interviews and an auction with proceeds going to organizations in Decatur County.

In past years the goal for the telethon board has been \$10,000, but this year organizers want to match the \$12,400 they raised last year. That was the most successful year thus far, organizers said.

The first hour will be devoted to showing auction items and bidding will begin at 2 p.m. Emcees will include Marvin Matchett, Martina Matchett and/or Janice Cundiff, Stan McEvoy, and Carolyn and Jim Plotts.

Each hour, different items will be showcased until all are sold. Bidding may be done by phone or at The Gateway in person.

Entertainment will include piano numbers, Rob McFee's jokes, quartets, various musical numbers, Teens for Christ choir and more. The entire event will be aired on Community Access Channel 7 on the Oberlin cable system, but everyone is welcome to come up and watch.

Items to be auctioned will be on display at the United Credit Union window in downtown Oberlin. Among things donated thus far are tools, a one-night stay at the Holiday Inn in Hays, a smoker and video recorder, donated by Prairieland Electric, and cash donations.

"We also hope to have some food to auction as well," said Anita Hirsch, one of the organizers, "including possibly kolaches from those good Jennings cooks, and others."

While this is going on in the arena, the Walk-a-Thon will be taking place on the walking track, under the direction of Dennis Brown. Mr. Brown has mailed letters to groups receiving money from the Telethon encouraging them to get out and get pledges in.

Walkers may stop at Hirsch and Pratt law firm on Main Street and pick up pledge sheets, then get sponsors for each lap. They can walk during the event or before, said Mrs. Hirsch.

Teens for Christ will serve barbecued beef sandwiches, baked potatoes with many toppings and homemade pies at the concession stand.

Auction committee Chairman Sarah Fredrickson said that the committee is looking for donations of items to be sold at the telethon. Donations are tax deductible and all donors will be sent a statement. Items could include meals, lodging, memorabilia, tickets, autographs, weekend packages, etc. Mrs. Fredrickson will be contacting merchants for auction items, which need to be made by Friday to be included in advance publicity. Call her at 475-3135.

Groups that will receive money include American Family Radio, Decatur Area Theater Association, Decatur County Area Chamber of Commerce, (Please see SEEDS on Page 10A)



A swingin' good time for seniors

ELEANOR DEMMER DANCED at the Good Samaritan Center (left) with a member from the Swingin' Seniors band. The band (right) performed at the center playing music from several genres. That afternoon residents enjoyed listening to the band. — Herald staff photos by Jeanette Krizek

School study targets Jennings, Herndon

By KIMBERLY BRANDT
A school boundary study ordered by the state Legislature projects the closing of Jennings and Herndon schools, but district officials say they have no plans to give up and don't think the state will make them.

The Prairie Heights district in Jennings, which serves kids from Jennings, Dresden and Clayton, and the Herndon district in northeast Rawlins County were among about 50 districts statewide classed as too small. Herndon also was characterized as having higher-than-average per-pupil spending and lower-than-expected results.

But while the study recommends cutting Kansas from the current 304 schools district to as few as 255 — there once were more than 9,000 — officials say it's just a study. The Legislature would have to make major changes in state law to begin the process.

The study was ordered during the last session of the Legislature and done by Augenblick and Myers Inc., a Denver consulting firm. The firm said it used two approaches to do research for the study. The first was to "focus on districts with relatively low levels of pupil performance and relatively high levels of per pupil spending," according to the study summary. This is where Herndon fell, although school officials say they don't know why the firm classed the district as low achieving.

The other approach was to look at the size of the schools and districts. The summary says that a high school should have between 100 to 900 pupils, with a district having total enrollment of at least 260 students for each high school, but no more than 2,925.

Prairie Heights' current enrollment is 89 students with only 43 in 9th through 12th grades. Herndon has 90 kids with 37 of them at the high school.

"The constitution of Kansas says that we should educate every student in the state," said Jennings Superintendent Dave DuBois, "not just the schools that have over 100 students in the high school."

The school employs 16 teachers, he said, and although it may be small, they get the job done. He said that the school has always had good academics.

"A person who drops out of school in our area is the exception," he said, "not the rule." (Please see STUDY on Page 10A)



ON ITS SIDE AFTER this accident on Oct. 16, Francis Moore's pickup flipped when struck by a Nebraska woman's car. The woman stopped, but then drove out into Mr. Moore's path— Herald file photo

State says U.S. 36-83 junction not bad enough to need changes

By KIMBERLY BRANDT
City and county officials want to see something done to make the intersection at U.S. 36 and U.S. 83 safer, but based on a "crash analysis" study, state officials say they don't plan to change anything.

Actually, one official said, "people navigate the intersection pretty well."

"At this time the state department doesn't plan to do anything to the intersection," said Cheryl A. Lambrecht, a senior engineer with the Kansas Department of Transportation, "although at the end of the year they will be working on a road audit."

After an accident last fall, Decatur County Commissioner Ralph Unger and City Councilman Gary Walter both wrote the state, asking the department to make the intersection safer.

The accident on Oct. 16 happened when Evelyn Barnes from Nebraska was traveling south on U.S. 83 and apparently did not see a westbound truck driven by Francis Moore of Oberlin. She started up from the stop sign, and the impact flipped Mr. Moore's pickup. All three people in the accident had to be taken by ambulance to Decatur County Hospital.

About three years ago, the state had the city take down a "bouncing ball" warning light over the intersection which flashed red for U.S. 83 and yellow for U.S. 36. Red flashing lights were installed above the oversized stop signs on U.S. 83, said City Administrator Gary Shike. Mr. Shike said that even with the lights on the signs, he thinks rumble strips would make the intersection safer.

Police Chief Wade Lockhart said that in his experience, most accidents at the intersection are caused by people running the stop signs or ones who stop and then don't look for traffic on U.S. 36. One way to solve the problem would be to put in stop lights, he said, though he understands state says there aren't enough accidents to justify that expense.

The state has the theory, "if it ain't broke, don't fix it," he said. Even though there aren't a large number of accidents at the intersection, Chief Lockhart said that the state doesn't look at the number of uncountable misses. He said that he doesn't want to wait for the worst to happen.

"Nobody needs to be injured or killed for something to (Please see SIGNS on Page 10A)

"At this time the state department doesn't plan to do anything to the intersection."
— Cheryl A. Lambrecht senior engineer, Kansas Department of Transportation

* Signs at U.S. 83-36 get OK from state engineer

(Continued from Page 1A) happen," said Ms. Lambrecht in her letter to the city and county, "but a low number of crash rates says that people are navigating the intersection well."

After receiving the letters, she said, the state did a crash analysis at the intersection for Jan. 1, 1997, to Aug. 31, 2000, counting accidents that caused at least \$500 in damage or caused an injury or fatality.

Ms. Lambrecht said that in that time, there were six accidents at the intersection while she said that the statewide average is four to five.

While the number here is above that average, she said that the intersection has a high volume of traffic. Taking that into account, she said, the number of accidents is low.

From the crash analysis, she said accidents were caused by failure to yield, drivers trying to turn with too small of a gap between them and the other car or were alcohol related. She said that none of them were because someone ran the stop sign.

During the last county meeting, Commissioner Unger suggested that they need to look again into getting something done about the

intersection. He asked if at the next meeting they could meet with city and county officials and work on another letter or plan.

There have been several suggestions, including a sign that says "Look again — U.S. 36 does not stop," putting in rumble strips or various types of lights.

"Anything that would help alert people to the fact that this is a controlled intersection," Mr. Unger said. "As a public official, I want to prevent a possible severe accident."

Sheriff Ken Badsky said that there is a grade difference at the intersection and people don't

always see what is going on when they come into town.

"There are probably several people in town who have almost been hit there," he said.

While people here are familiar with the junction and its hazards, he said, not everyone driving on the highways is from this area. Many are passing through and don't know that the stop signs are there or that U.S. 36 doesn't stop.

One accident at the intersection sent two women to the hospital by ambulance and both were later flown to Denver with serious injuries, said Sheriff Badsky.

He said that he doesn't know the answer, but suggested rumble strips.

State officials said that there are already "advanced traffic control devices" at the intersection, including the red flashers and oversized stop signs. A northbound driver sees two "stop ahead" signs and a southbound driver the same.

"With the junction signing," Ms Lambrecht wrote, "motorists are sufficiently warned of the stop condition. Sight distance at the intersection is adequate."

Officials here disagree. They say they still want to see something change.

Bureau questions office need

Convention and Visitors Bureau board members questioned what they get for the \$350 a month they give the Oberlin-Decatur County Chamber of Commerce at a meeting last Wednesday night.

The bureau has its contact point at the chamber office and gets their mail sent there. Carol Barrett, owner of Spring Creek Castings, brought up the idea of changing the contact point to the museum and giving them the \$350. Curator Fonda Farr abstained from the conversation.

She said the museum can use the money and there would always be someone to answer the phone. Carolyn Burris, a real estate agent, said her first thought is that a visitor would call the Chamber for information, they wouldn't call the museum.

City Councilman Stan McEvoy asked if people are calling for tourism information at the chamber. Helen Gee, manager of the chamber, was unable to be at the meeting so wasn't able to answer the questions, but at one time there was a log of calls, the members thought.

They agreed that they should ask for that log and what they get for the \$350.

Mr. McEvoy said that he isn't sure what the bureau is paying for, nor is he sure the chamber knows. The group agreed that they need to talk with the chamber board.

In the last year, the bureau agreed to pay more to the chamber to help them stay open, said Connie Grafel, marketing director with the Oberlin-Decatur County Economic Development Corp.

The corporation pays for half of the rent for the office and salary.

Also at the meeting, the board looked at a proposal for the tourism center on the corner of U.S. 36 and U.S. 83 in the old police station. Ms. Grafel said that at the last chamber meeting, the board was asked to help support it and seemed willing to give some money.

She checked for utility prices when the station was open and said that in 1997 it was \$530 and 1998 it was \$690 for the year for the electricity. She also checked with the a woman who used to run an information center in Norton and she estimated that each vehicle contact the center made cost \$7.89 and each customer \$3.15. The center is no longer open.

Although Mrs. Gee has talked about free coffee in the center, Ms. Grafel said that she didn't know if this would work, especially since there will be two businesses across the street that can offer coffee. Mrs. Farr suggested putting racks of brochures in both of those stations.

Gary Anderson, owner of the LandMark Inn, said that if Green Thumb has agreed to put someone in a center, he thought that they should try it for a year.

The center idea was tabled, although the board agreed that if they pursue it, they should have the center open in late April. Members also said that they want to keep the proposal to a couple paragraphs discussing services, utilities and equipment they will need.

* Seeds hopes to raise cash

(Continued from Page 1A)

Decatur County Ministerial Association, Decatur County Stand Against Violence, Doorway Ministries, Forget-Me-Nots, Jennings City Library, Jennings Heritage Associates, King's Kids, Norcatour Pre-School, Oberlin Arts and Humanities, Oberlin Boy Scouts, Cub Scouts and Girl Scouts, Oberlin Swim Club, Salvation Army, Teens for Christ, Lions Club, Oberlin Jaycees and Decatur County Museum.

At the telethon, each of the 21 organizations will give an interview. The telethon board will split what is raised 21 ways.

Last year, those groups wrote letters to the telethon board about what they would like to use that money for, said Mrs. Hirsch.

"Each donation," she said "is one gift that gets separated into many. For some groups, it helps them the whole year and then there are others that help only for an event or two.



ENJOYING CHILI AND DESSERT, Dave and Patty Stapp (above) helped support the high school vocal music department Friday by eating at the concession stand during the Oberlin Invitational. Karli Fredrickson (below right) got \$50 from Travis Hissong of the Oberlin Jaycees for her hoop shooting abilities after winning a halftime contest.

— Herald staff photos by Cynthia Haynes

Boosters want to help all students

The Oberlin Booster Club, formed to support activities at Decatur Community High School, has held its first fundraiser and is looking for people who want to be members.

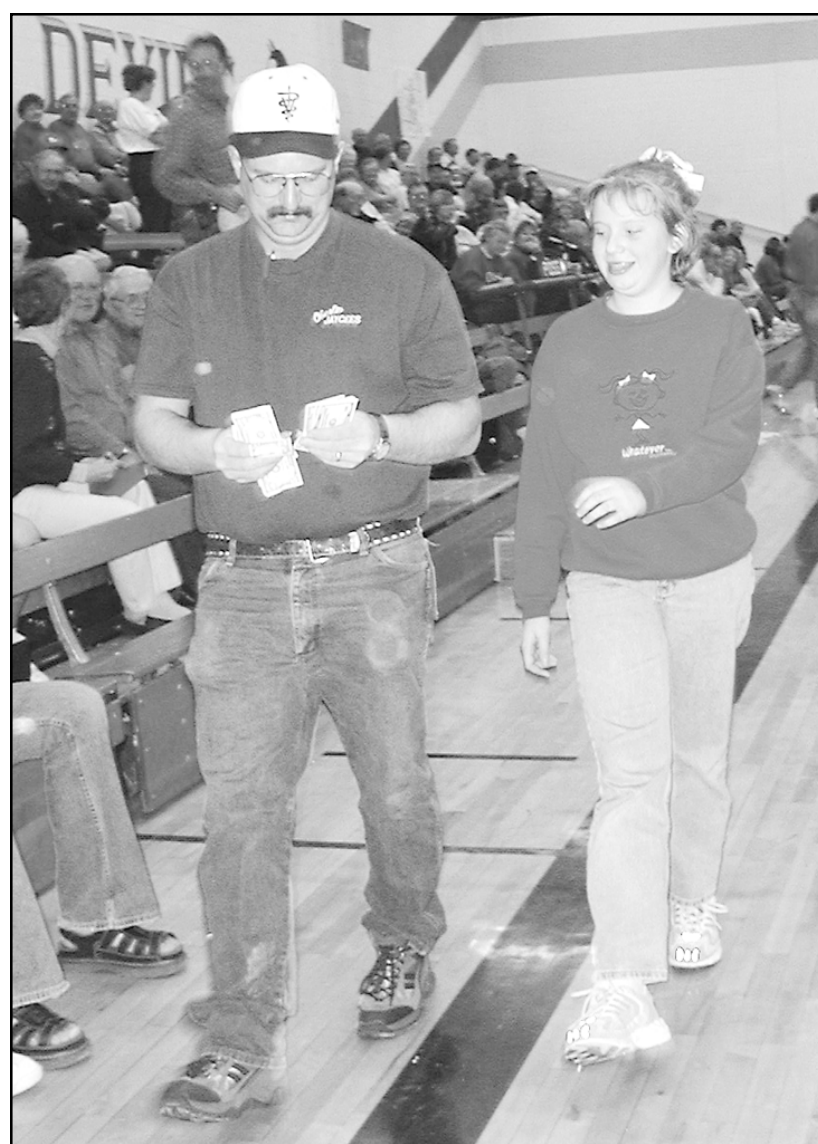
At an Oberlin-Decatur County Chamber of Commerce meeting, Dave Stapp, who started the club with his wife, showed off some of the items the members have been working on. On Jan. 6, the club held a soup supper at the old cafe downtown.

He said that the club was started to help keep sports at the school more positive and once they have mastered helping the sports teams, they would like to move into supporting all areas at the school. Although they have started to raise the money, he said they don't know what they will do with it yet, except that they know they want to give back to the kids.

One idea is to have a plaque for kids who participate in three sports all four years of high school. This would recognize them for each year and each sport, said Mr. Stapp. They have also thought of holding a sports banquet with a motivational speaker and getting the banquet already held back to having a meal instead of being potluck.

Another idea for the money is to help send athletes to camps. The group has been working on promotional items for the winter sports, including a towel which says Oberlin Boosters in red for wrestling and a small red basketball.

Mr. Stapp said that they have received support from the school though the coaches are a little wary that the club



will try to control them. He said that wasn't why they were organized; they want to work with the coaches.

Membership fees range from \$10 for a single person to \$25 for a family and \$25 for a "white" booster, \$50 for a "gray" booster and \$100 for a "red" one. Each member will receive a pin and those who become red boosters will

receive a plaque.

Mr. Stapp said there are plenty of wrestling fans, but he would like to see more go to the games because football and basketball are struggling.

Chamber President Gary Zodrow said that the club sounded like a good idea and he hoped that the board could support it.

Social aims to teach clerks to sell area

Oberlin's first "tourism social" will be held at 6 p.m. Tuesday at the LandMark Inn with the founder of the Kansas Sampler Festival speaking.

Marci Penner will be speaking at the social to help get people here excited about what the area and the state have to offer tourists.

"We all need to be aware of what is around us," said Gary Anderson, owner of the LandMark Inn, "and be able to tell people about it."

The evening, sponsored by the Convention and Visitors Bureau, will be in a discussion workshop format, Mr.

Anderson said, with Ms. Penner asking about the area and what people here have to offer and then getting them excited about it. The idea is to have all employees be able to sell the area to visitors and keep them in town longer.

The evening will cost \$2 for every person and appetizers will be served. Two weeks ago, letters were sent out inviting employees. Each business that sends two people will be eligible to win \$50. Mr. Anderson said that they will give door prizes from area businesses.

The bureau members asked that people register by Friday for the event

by calling the LandMark at 472-2340.

"Marci is an exciting speaker," said Mr. Anderson. "She has a lot to say about promoting Kansas and this area. She will energize people and it will be a fun evening."

Smoke came from furnace fan

Early Jan. 10 Edwin Holsman smelled smoke upstairs in his house.

Oberlin firefighters arrived at his home at 207 S. Marks at 3 a.m. to find no flames. Fire Chief Bill Cathcart said that they found that the smoke smell

* Study of schools targets small units

(Continued from Page 1A)

Mr. DuBois said that as long as they can stay in the 80-student range, he feels they should stay open. Like other schools, including Oberlin, they have declining numbers, he said, but if they can continue to bring kids into the district they can keep the enrollment up.

"I think that the theme of the study is to try to encourage schools to work together as resources become tighter," he said, adding that Jennings does this already by working with Lenora on sports teams.

The Legislature hasn't acted on the study yet, but if they do, it could change life in Jennings. Superintendent DuBois said that closing schools would be economically devastating for the town. Not only would teachers and staff be out of work, but money that is spent in Jennings and Oberlin will no longer be there. The district buys supplies in both of the towns, he said, including propane, food and miscellaneous supplies.

The study suggests that if Jennings closed, it would send students to Oberlin. Superintendent DuBois said that could result in some long bus rides. Today, he said, they don't have a bus ride that is over 50 minutes, but it takes around 30 minutes to get from Jennings to Oberlin.

One solution recommended in the study is "emergency dissolution," which would require "those districts that are less than 80 students in 2000 or less than 100 students in 2001 and have declining enrollment" to close. The school board in a district would have to hold a public meeting and report back to the state Board of Education. Superintendent DuBois said that today, the state department doesn't have the right to close a school. He said that they will have to go through the Legislature.

For now, he said, Jennings officials are watching to see what comes from the study, and then they will become active on the issue.

Herndon is listed among "districts with higher than expected per pupil spending and lower than average pupil

performances for two years."

Superintendent Kim Juenemann said that she doesn't know where the firm got the information that they spent more per pupil or that students in the district scored below state average for two years. She said that they have not overspent their budget and haven't had low test scores.

The reverse is true, she said. This year, she said, the fifth grade class scored in the state's "excellence" range in standard testing. The district's "Destination Imagination" team took second in world competition last year.

She said most of the students ride the bus or drive to school with some trips of up to an hour. The study pairs the district with Atwood, and she said that could force some kids to have to drive almost two hours to get to school.

Superintendent Juenemann said that she doesn't see mandatory consolidation coming out of the study.

"The thing that people need to keep in mind is that it is a study," she said. "It is up to the Legislature to do anything with it, and it looks like right now they will turn it back to the state Board of Education."

She said that the district is leveling out in enrollment, and she thought they would stay in the 90 to 100 range.

She said school officials are trying to inform people in the area about what is happening. She wonders why some people in Topeka want to push consolidation.

"Nowhere in the study does it say that closing schools will save money or that larger schools provide better education," she said.

She said that as long as they can pay the bills, Herndon schools will remain open. She said that she didn't want to speculate on what might happen to Herndon if the schools closes, because it won't happen.

"The school is not closing," said Superintendent Juenemann. "We are planning for the future and making adjustments in spending and hiring."

* Scores high on tests

(Continued from Page 1A)

said, "but whenever we look at assessments, we are looking at what we can improve in specific areas."

He said that they look at two- or three-year trends. For example, if one year they see a spike up or down in an area, they don't do anything. If they begin to see a trend after a couple of years, they make changes, he said.

At the elementary school, the students scored above the state average in almost every area. There haven't been any violent acts against students or teachers at the school, Mr. Dorshorst said, not only in the last year but in the last four years that the graph shows.

The information on the elementary school shows an enrollment of 281 students with 54 percent boys and 46 percent girls.

Scores at the grade school show that the fifth graders, who were tested for English, scored 37 percent in the advanced range to 15.4 percent in the state and 30 percent proficient compared to

24.8 percent for the state. The school had 9 percent who were unsatisfactory in the area with 13.7 percent in the state.

The grade school's attendance was also high, and Mr. Dorshorst said that it is always good. The school had 96.9 percent attendance for the year, up .3 percent from the year before.

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