

Description of the School

Pierce is a progressive community of nearly 2000 people located in northeast Nebraska, 14 miles northwest of Norfolk. Pierce Public Schools has a PreK-12 student population of 676 which encompasses over 200 square miles in a 573 square mile county. The district operates separate elementary (PK-6) and junior senior high school (7-12) attendance centers, both located in Pierce. The district provides a comprehensive program of instruction, supplemented by a wide range of extracurricular activities.

Overall enrollment at Pierce Public Schools has seen a slight decline over the past five years, whereas at the elementary enrollment has increased. The current enrollment at Pierce Elementary School is 355, with a range of 342 to 355 over the past 5 years. Enrollment at the Jr Sr High School is 321, with a range of 348 to 324 over the past 5 years. As with many rural communities, Pierce is seeing an overall decline in population as well as an aging population, thus affecting the schools.

The demographics of Pierce students are fairly straightforward. Pierce is a homogeneous community, as 97% of our students are white. Challenging economic times have hit our community and school, but not as severely as other places, as a result approximately 23% of our student population qualifies for free and/or reduced lunches. We realize we are fortunate to have such a low number in this demographic category.

Pierce does not have an English Language Learner program, as 0 students are non-native English speakers.

Two areas where we are higher than the state average are with special education students and ACT scores. Pierce's special education population is slightly over 17.5%. Our ACT scores are an average of 22.5, compared to the state average of 21.5. Our district can also boast an over 96% student attendance rate.

As far as accountability by the Nebraska State Accountability system (NeSA), combined district results show 89% met or exceeded proficiency in reading, 92% met or exceeded proficiency in math, 83% met or exceeded proficiency in science, and 84% met or exceeded proficiency in writing. These scores show that we are closing the gap, as we have moved from a range of percent proficient in the 70s to the percent proficient being in the 80s and 90s. According to Nebraska Performance Accountability System (NePAS) in the 2012-13 school year, Pierce ranked 31st out of 249 schools in NeSA reading, 5th out of 249 in NeSA math, and 70th out of 249 in NeSA science. The Extended Six Year Cohort data for Graduation Rate ranks Pierce 1st out of 234 districts.

In May 2010, Pierce was placed on the PLAS (Persistently Low Achieving Schools) list as a Tier III elementary school. This meant our school performance was not increasing. Since being placed on this list, our district has implemented improvement strategies toward our removal from this list, which has extended the success of our students, something we value as important. We truly strive to ensure that no child is left behind when they attend Pierce Public Schools.

The entire staff is directly involved in the development of curriculum and the writing of assessments to guide the implementation of the curriculum and the students' learning. The Curriculum Leadership Institute's (CLI) model has been used to direct this process, leading us to have our own High Achievement Unit Outcomes.

As a district during the 2012-13 school year, 56% of our faculty members held a master's degree, with the average years of teaching experience being over 20 years. In the past 3 years, Pierce has experienced a decline in the total number of teachers. Many took an early retirement incentive offered by the school district during the 2011-12 school year. Thus, class sizes have increased since.

Due to retirements, Pierce saw a change in superintendency starting in Fall 2011, and in Fall 2013, we hired a new elementary principal and assistant principal/activities director at the high school. Upon examination of our school improvement process by new personnel taking over for those who left, we found missing elements, but we realize that the focus needs to now be on the school improvement process, as well as what we can do to improve for the future. The Patron Advisory Committee was used during the first three years of the current school improvement cycle; however, it has been put on hold as we evaluate a more effective format to gather stakeholder input and feedback. The Staff Advisory Committee is active when needed.

Technology is a point of emphasis at Pierce Public Schools. At the elementary building, a comprehensive technology program is in place, utilizing carts of laptops, iPod and iPad collections, and Mimeoos. At the high school building, a one to one laptop initiative has been in place since the fall of 2007. Ongoing efforts and trainings are provided by technology staff members to push our faculty and support staff to fully utilize the technology resources available.

The community of Pierce offers a variety of economic opportunities, ranging from business to agriculture to retail with many offshoots in between. Though Pierce does not boast a large manufacturing presence, some community members work in Norfolk in the manufacturing industry. By far, the crop and livestock production areas of agriculture have a large impact upon the school community. In turn, the agriculture economy is largely affected by property taxes. Current levy rates are as follows: general fund 1.03; bond fund .113; and capital purpose fund .008. Approximately 70% of our district's funding comes from local property taxes.

The stability of the Pierce community is seen through the various businesses as well. Pierce is the company headquarters for Midwest Bank, Pierce Telephone Company, Town and Country Insurance, and numerous other small businesses. Over the past 3 years, Pierce has seen growth in the business sector. However, like many small communities, Pierce loses quite a bit of business to larger cities, such as Norfolk, Sioux City, Lincoln, and Omaha.

School's Purpose

The mission of the Pierce Public Schools is to provide quality programs and quality staff for all students. We encourage community involvement and support in preparing all students to succeed as responsible citizens, lifelong learners, and confident members of a changing society.

In accomplishing this mission, Pierce Public Schools adheres to the vision that E^2 =Excellence in Education - Nothing Less.

Also, we believe that technology is a tool that is an accelerator of what we do with and for our students. Therefore, it is an integral part of what we do in our day. The technology, use of technology, and implementation of technology in both the classroom and extracurricular setting propels us to higher level thinking and improved student level engagement. The introduction of technology to students begins at an early age in Preschool through 6th grades, as well as the full immersion of technology with our 1 to 1 laptop program in grades 7 through 12. All of this technology allows us to use this technology as an accelerator of learning for students.

Pierce Public Schools offers a range of courses in addition to the core areas of Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Sciences. Some of the additional course offerings are in Family and Consumer Science, Foreign Language, Agricultural Education, Industrial Technology, Business, Physical Education and Health, Music, Art, and Informational Technology.

In addition to the required core courses and variety of elective courses, Pierce High School also requires students to take a Real World Seminar class. This course is a series of three 6 week mini-courses including Money Management & Financial Planning, Parenting & Family Life, and Home & Auto Maintenance. This class will give upperclassmen students at Pierce High School the necessary tools and information needed to be successful once they graduate and begin life on their own.

Pierce Public Schools believe that the School Improvement Process is comprised of a series of short term goals as well as long term goals to better aid and prepare our students to be confident members of a changing society.

Notable Achievements and Areas of Improvement

NeSA test scores have shown remarkable improvement over the past few years. We believe that our test scores have improved and continue to improve through what we do day to day, through curriculum alignment and exceptional instructional strategies. We also hold review sessions prior to the state tests, which are vital. Last school year we made students aware of the importance of the state tests. We showed our students a comparison of how Pierce ranked compared to other area schools. All of our comprehension teaching now has purpose for our students. Additional reasons we believe our scores increased is because we provide students with testing skills by guiding them in how to read and take the various tests. Teachers are using the Check 4 Learning (C4L) reviews to work back through the areas where students struggle as a formative assessment. Although the NeSA testing is important, we feel that using John Baylor test prep for students taking the ACT exam is vital and shows the importance of rigor needed for academics at a post secondary level.

Because reading comprehension and vocabulary are so closely tied together, our schools are using a variety of strategies to reach all students and ultimately increase their academic success. Some of the strategies we have used in the last three years are Sound Partners, Corrective Reading, Silent Sustained Reading, DIBELS, Saxon Phonics, Saxon Grammar, Evan Moor comprehension skills, and Evan Moor words of the day.

Aside from academics, we won the state C1 championship in Girls Basketball in Spring 2013. In 2010-11 and 2011-12 our school received the Nebraska School Activities Association Sportsmanship Award. Also in 2013, Pierce was the recipient of the Class C1 Sportsmanship Award. We have had numerous teams qualify for state tournaments including Girls' Golf in 2013. Our One Act play qualified for state in 2011 and 2013. In Fall 2010 our Boys' Cross Country team qualified for state. Also that year, we were State Runner Up in Football. Our Cheer squad finished first in Non-Tumbling Small in 2013.

Throughout the past three years, numerous additions, changes, and creations have taken place. Our school has had to change to fit the needs of our students. One of the areas ever evolving is with technology. Our students and faculty use technology for research, to make life more efficient, to get to deeper meaning and higher thinking levels faster, and in conjunction with a projector, to show items for more visual learning. Saxon Math and English are in place at both buildings, which allows students and teachers alike to focus on the needed repetition and review to enhance student learning. During this school improvement cycle, all grades K-12 use the L to J process, which shows recognition and improvement of vocabulary terms using content area vocabulary.

At the high school building, we have seen an overall decrease in our class failure rate due in part to compulsory retakes of tests and an after school homework study hall that is mandatory for students who have incomplete work. This same homework study hall was recently introduced at the elementary school as well. The junior senior high school has built in an access time/study hall time at the end of the school day for all students.

Another item that has helped students improve was the implementation of an incentive program for juniors going into their senior year. Items tied to the Senior Privilege program include NeSA proficiency, attendance, academics, discipline, and extracurricular activities.

Specifically at the elementary building, daily reading comprehension activities take place using Evan Moor data comprehension. Also REDCAT System is used which enhances auditory learning by using a microphone audio system to amplify audio learning. MAP (Measures of Academic Progress) assessments are given twice during the year.

At the junior senior high school building, MAP assessments are given twice per year to grades 7, 9, and 10. In addition, 7th and 8th graders have a split block in both Math and English, allowing students to have these two courses year round, rather than just one semester, as traditional block schedule would dictate. Our junior high classes have an exploratory writing section to help students improve their writing skills.

Both buildings utilize Bluejay Rooms to help struggling students who are caught between regular education classrooms and special education qualification. We want to ensure that no students slip through the proverbial cracks.

Additional Information

We are proud to be Pierce Bluejays. At both of our buildings we try to instill the attitude that we strive to produce productive citizens and lifelong learners. Not only do we focus on well-rounded children, but we create a special focus on character education at Pierce Public Schools to ensure that all students feel confident. The junior-senior high school uses the 8 to Great character development program to help students gain skills essential to their lives. In addition, students have the opportunity for added character and personal growth through Teen Talk small group experiences. Mentorship with community members is provided through the TeamMates program where an identified student is matched with an adult from the community. The mentor meets with her or his student either from the elementary or junior senior high school once per week for 45 minutes during the school day.

At both buildings, our School Community Intervention Program (SCIP) teams identify at risk students and try to set up interventions to help these students become successful. Despite larger class sizes at the elementary, our staff members work to create smaller learning environments by using certificated para educators to guide lessons. Another opportunity paraeducators provide is for reteaching of necessary assignments during recess time. Because paraeducators supervise recess time, classroom teachers are able to reteach students who may need extra help.

Since 2009, students at the junior senior high school participate in a school wide community service day, where we can give back to the community that supports us. Based upon our examination of data, surveys, and other items completed at the beginning of this cycle, we have plans in the new cycle to re-examine all items and make appropriate revisions.