

State of the District #57 Schools
Rules and Standards, (Chapter 581, Oregon Administrative Rules), and the quality of
Falls City public education.

State of the District

Each year Oregon's public school superintendents are required to report on the conditions of their schools and educational programs falling within the jurisdiction of their locally elected board of directors. The standards and requirements found within Chapter 581 of Oregon Administrative Rules pertaining to public K-12 education fill over 90 pages, and range from the certification requirements of staff to curriculum adoptions to the safety of school facilities. It is the responsibility of the district's superintendent to ensure that all rules and standards are being met, and to report to the community each year, deficiencies and corrective measures regarding these rules and standards.

First I am happy to report that all current Division 22 and 23 standards are being met to the great benefit of Falls City students. Due in a large part to the commitment of students, staff, and parents, and the willingness of the community's voters to provide additional dollars for targeted school and community programs, Falls City Schools continue to offer educational opportunities that fully prepare our students for adult life beyond public school.

Quality of Education, Pre-K through the 12th Grade and beyond . . .

Many changes have occurred in the past few years regarding student achievement, growth, and development. New graduation standards, requirements for student proficiency, and the need for diversity in preparation for continued education after high school are exciting additions to our small district's education agenda. The District's schools offer a pre-school enrichment program, an afternoon child development service, quality elementary level instruction that meets federal and state Annual Yearly Progress achievement standards, continually updated technology access for all students, highly qualified teachers supporting junior/senior high school instruction that also meets Annual Yearly Progress standards in academic achievement, expanded options for college credit while in high school, and a fifth year college credit program for qualified students.

Financial Standing

A question often asked, however, is what about the "status" of our school district; will it have to consolidate in the near future because of its size? The answer continues to be NO because of the willingness of local taxpayers to provide additional dollars for the next five years (2010-2015) to keep our schools open and not substandard when state revenues fall short, and because of prudent and effective budget management on the part of the District's board of directors. For years Falls City School District (one of the property poorest in the Willamette Valley) deferred the care of its facilities, made little investment in technology, used old and outdated curriculum, and provided instruction for students based upon seat time rather than on increasing student achievement. In spite of these

problems, willing students were assisted by fine teachers who supported fully their efforts to gain a quality education. In the past twelve years, it has been the goal of the District's board to insist on high quality for its instructional program, but for all students, not just those who wanted to achieve. With support from a dedicated staff, and the support they enjoy from the Falls City community, this goal has been realized.

But along with such support come some potential hard choices. Already administrative costs have been reduced by 25%, and will be reduced again next year. Because of recession induced State School Fund shortfalls, licensed staff salaries have been voluntarily frozen while out-of-pocket benefit costs have risen over 20% each year. The goal of everyone involved with Falls City schools (school board and budget committee, teachers association, classified staff, and management team) has been to protect at all costs the classroom and the educational opportunities we provide for Falls City students.

Goals for the Future

As is the case in most rural environments, in meeting both educational as well as civic needs, Falls City's schools are the center of its community.. The District currently sponsors an after school recreational program for all eligible children, a branch public library, and a no cost sports program with one of the finest small school athletic facilities in the region. It is also engaged in reducing its carbon footprint with a science and technology initiative that has received the support and recognition of hundreds of donors, including donations from major timber companies, small businesses, the Oregon National Guard, ODOT, and the Bonneville Power Administration. Falls City's Green Construction program has just completed Polk County's first solar generating, straw bale, self-composting sanitation facility, and intends to expand its focus in the area of sustainability education.

Also in the planning stages is the expansion of program choices for high school students, and the addition of AP opportunities for those headed for higher education. The District also is beginning to consider the need to expand its public library facility, as well as plan for school facility improvements.

As the population of Polk county continues to grow, residents can be reassured that they have a number of school choices that provide different experiences for students. Falls City's schools offer small class sizes, more personalized instruction, and the ability to meet the changing needs of students in a matter of months rather than years. We are proud of our schools, and of our accomplishments, and continue to grow in quality rather than size. Evidence continues to support the idea that smaller more intimate school environments foster higher degrees of student learning and achievement. This is our commitment, and it continues to be our experience.

Peter M. Tarzian, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools
Falls City School District #57