Historic LPS student numbers represent future of community

Welcoming historic, record-breaking numbers, Lincoln Public Schools reports a 2008-09 enrollment of about 34,000 students: a generation of students who represent the future of Lincoln, Nebraska.

“We have come far in our journey from good to great – far in the quality of education children receive – far in the quality of classroom teaching,” LPS Superintendent Susan Gourley said. “But no single program has made this happen. Our student success is the result of many concerted efforts that underline our commitment to instruction and teaching.”

Gourley stressed, however, that excellence in schools is not just about achievement scores. “Excellence in our school district translates into excellence in our community,” she said. “Our public schools are a vital piece of Lincoln’s economic health. Our schools and our community are inextricably woven together.”

Gourley pointed out that excellence at LPS has impact on:

- Lincoln’s future workforce.
- Attracting business and industry to Lincoln.
- Nurturing future leaders.
- Creating a local climate that values education.

Lillie Larsen, president of the Lincoln Board of Education, agreed. “Lincoln’s investment in schools is an affirmation of its investment in the future of our community.”

At the same time, she said, “our school district also must continue to be vigilant in serving as good stewards of our community resources. We must work tirelessly to make sure taxpayer dollars are used in the most effective way possible.”

Larsen pointed to examples of LPS fiscal responsibility:

- Allocation of about 85 percent of the General Fund to instruction.
- Lowered tax levy rate.
- Constant search for cost-saving efficiencies.
- Exceptional audits.
- Triple A bond ratings (one of a handful of school districts in the nation to earn this highest rating).
- Developing sound, long-term financing strategies to build new schools and improve existing facilities (without raising taxes).
- Working to control utility bills with forward-thinking decisions about heating and cooling.
- Helping to keep our community economically healthy with bond-issue construction.

Ted Sorensen served as the major speech writer for President John F. Kennedy. But this summer the Lincoln native’s best-selling book, “Counselor: A Life at the Edge of History,” told the world about another key part of his life: Sorensen is a graduate of Lincoln Public Schools.

In his book, the acclaimed author cited lessons from Lincoln High, Irving Junior High and Sheridan Elementary School – and how those teachings translated into American history. “To give credit where credit is due, to the extent that my help in 1960 might have contributed to JFK’s successful debate against Richard Nixon, my high school debate coach, Florence Jenkins, who taught me much of what I knew about public speaking and debating, deserves at least a footnote in the history of that election.”

Sorensen also said that his approach to drafting a response to Nikita Khruschev during the Cuban Missile Crisis was borrowed from an old Lincoln High debate technique: taking the other side’s presentation and interpreting it as supporting your own objectives.

“Sorensen gives us renewed appreciation for the historical importance of our school district,” LPS Superintendent Susan Gourley said.
Dr. Gourley: News and views from the Superintendent of Schools

Annual Report presents accomplishments from great year

We are pleased to present the 2007-08 Annual Report for Lincoln Public Schools to our community.

We are proud of our school district’s many milestones and accomplishments over the past school year, a testament to the excellence in our schools – and the result of much hard work from our teachers, administrators and staff members.

In this issue of our Annual Report, you’ll find:

- Increasing and impressive scores in student achievement at most all levels and in most categories. For example, we saw a significant increase in the composite score for our ACT tests this spring. The LPS score was 23.3, considerably higher than both state and national scores.
- Significant and increasing highs for high school graduation rates, and record lows for dropout rates.
- Prestigious state and national honors bestowed upon our students, teachers and administrators.
- Innovative changes in our school district to ensure our students have every opportunity to grow and learn.
- Construction and renovation projects in our schools from one end of the district to the other – schools in the middle of the city and schools on the edges of the city – elementary, middle and high schools.
- Budget numbers that reflect ongoing fiscal responsibility and sound business management.
- To fully meet the needs of our growing student numbers, as well as our growing diversity and student needs.

This fall, as our community continues to change in size and complexity, student enrollment at Lincoln Public Schools has grown to a record-breaking 34,000. Our challenge as a school district is two-fold:

- To best utilize our limited resources in the middle of this astounding growth in our school district.
- To stay the course on our mission and keep our students’ growth at the top of our list.

But our mission remains steadfast and we intend to stay the course on our journey. Our major goal continues to be student learning, ensuring that our students grow up to reach their fullest potential – for the benefit of their own future as well as for the future of our community.

Lillie Larsen: School Board’s letter to the community

Each school year, as a member of the Lincoln Board of Education, one of my major priorities is to visit as many schools as possible.

I am always amazed and astounded at what I see throughout Lincoln Public Schools: talented teachers challenging their students, raising the bar, giving attention and care to each and every student.

I see learning that begins with our kindergartners, children who are starting to comprehend their very first words, to add and subtract their very first numbers.

I see middle school children on the cusp of adulthood, choosing more complicated books and tackling more complex challenges.

I see high school students excel in every area of life: drama and debate, music and math, world history and scientific concepts, literature and athletics.

Each and every day of the school year, LPS teachers are creating miracles in every single classroom.

I encourage you to visit our schools. I invite all Lincoln citizens to stop by your neighborhood elementary, middle or high school.

I urge parents and families to get involved. Volunteer.

Call if you have suggestions or questions.

You are always welcome at Lincoln Public Schools.

Board of Education meets twice monthly

The Lincoln Board of Education is the elected governing body of Lincoln Public Schools. Board members are elected to four-year terms and serve without pay.

School Board members encourage public attendance and participation when appropriate. Anyone interested in commenting at Board meetings may speak at the beginning or end of the session. A time limit of 5 minutes will be allotted for any speaker. Each individual addressing the Board will be required to complete a “Record of Appearance” card while at the Board meeting.

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This Lincoln Public Schools Community Newsletter is a publication of Lincoln Public Schools. LPS does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, marital status, disability, or age in admission or access to, or treatment of employment, in its programs and activities. If you have any questions about this publication please contact Mary Kay Roth, 436-1609; or Cathy Townsley, 436-1610; Lincoln Public Schools, P.O. Box 82889, Lincoln, NE 68501-2889.
Significant change and innovation throughout school district

The legacy of excellence continues at Lincoln Public Schools, but a new era in education also calls for new solutions and road maps. The world of LPS is changing.

International Baccalaureate
Lincoln High School welcomes 30 students to the new International Baccalaureate (IB) Program this fall. A 2005 gift from Union Bank and Trust helped facilitate the process.

Recognized as the most academically rigorous high school program in the world, the IB Program is open to LPS juniors and seniors from across the school district.

“Middle school report cards
A new middle school report card – piloted last year – will offer all LPS middle school students and their families additional and more useful information, Jacobson said.

The report card features three different marks, Jacobson explained, "more fully and accurately reflecting what is happening in a student's life."

A letter grade will report the student's academic achievement: what a student knows and is able to do.

Two additional marks report on other aspects of a student:

- Work study habits: Is the student on task, trying hard, organized, participating?
- Social behavior: Does the student get along with others, socialize?

"We want the academic grade to accurately reflect what the student really knows," Jacobson said. "But we also believe families will identify connections between what students are learning - and their study habits, and behavior."

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"This is one more rigorous opportunity for our students, setting another level of higher expectations," said Marilyn Moore, associate superintendent of Instruction at LPS.

IB Coordinator John Heineman agreed. "This program truly offers another alternative for LPS students who want to go beyond the regular classroom to take on a more rigorous, college preparation program."

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The 2008 senior class at LPS set an all-time record high with composite scores for the ACT: 23.3, a significant increase over the previous year. That score is considerably higher than the Nebraska composite score of 22.1, and the national score of 21.1.

ACT 2008 scores

The ACT is America’s most widely accepted college entrance examination, assessing a student’s general educational development and ability to handle college-level work. Scores range from 1 to 36.

Graduation demonstrations

All LPS high school students must meet graduation demonstrations in reading, math and writing in order to graduate. Here are the percentages of students who met those requirements.

PLAN

PLAN is administered to LPS sophomores to help measure their current academic development, explore career options, and make plans for high school years. Standard scores are 1 to 32.

Graduation rates

Lincoln Public Schools saw 79.8 percent of students graduate from high school on time in 2007. The graduation rate for Lincoln Public Schools has shown steady and impressive improvement in the last decade.

To keep informed about and support the work of Lincoln Public Schools:

- Volunteer: Call your local elementary, middle level or high school.
- TeamMates: To mentor a student, call 436-1990.
- Foundation for Lincoln Public Schools: Provides new and expanded opportunities beyond what tax dollars support.
  To financially support Lincoln Public Schools, call 436-1612, or go to www.foundationforlps.org.
Lincoln Public Schools students made significant improvements in achievement and standards in the 2007-08 school year, and the reasons are as varied as the students themselves.

Scores improved district-wide, and the achievement gap narrowed for students of color, special education students, and immigrant and refugee students.

“This achievement is one in which the whole district can share,” said Marilyn Moore, associate superintendent for Instruction at LPS.

For more information about testing at LPS go to the Web site: www.lps.org. Click on instruction and curriculum, then assessment, evaluation, testing and statistics.

Student achievement at Lincoln Public Schools remains high, as evidenced in the spring 2008 MAT scores. Math scores for third graders were particularly astounding at 91: far above the national average percentile ranking of 50.

Excellence in student performance result of many efforts

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The teams review and analyze student performance data, monitor student achievement on a regular basis and develop strategies to support individual student achievement.

“I see us moving to the next step with PLCs this school year,” Moore said. “We will see a richer conversation at deeper levels, a continuing discussion. This year it will become part of the culture at LPS.”

Achievement tests

Students in grades 3, 5 and 7 annually take the Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT). These scores allow comparison to students across the country. Scores are reported in national percentile ranks with the average at 50.

Elementary Math
- Numeration/Computation: 77.6 percent
- Measurement/Geometry: 87.1 percent
- Algebra/Data Analysis: 83.9 percent

Middle School Math
- Numeration/Computation: 84.7 percent
- Geometry: 84 percent
- Algebra/Data Analysis: 82.6 percent

High School Math
- Algebra: 91 percent
- Geometry: 88.1 percent

Elementary English
- Reading Comprehension: 90.2 percent
- Vocabulary: 89.6 percent

Middle School English
- Research: 97.9 percent
- Elements of Fiction: 92.9 percent
- Elements of Non-Fiction: 93 percent
- Presentations: 95.6 percent

High School English
- Reading Comprehension: 95.7 percent
- Research: 95.9 percent
- Elements of Fiction: 96 percent
- Elements of Non-Fiction: 96.7 percent
- Presentations: 87.7 percent

State standards

Every student in the state is expected to meet standards approved by the Nebraska Department of Education. These assessments are administered in core academic areas such as reading and math. The standards measure various skills in each of these areas. For instance, elementary students might take English standard assessments in reading comprehension and vocabulary. The numbers below are the percentage of students who tested proficient in 2007-08.

For more information about testing at LPS go to the Web site: www.lps.org. Click on instruction and curriculum, then assessment, evaluation, testing and statistics.
Students, teachers and staff at Sheridan Elementary School – one of the oldest schools in the district – returned to a totally renovated facility this school year (right).

Extensive renovations are now underway at all four of the older public high schools in Lincoln.

Construction changing the face of Lincoln Public Schools

There are 61 buildings in Lincoln Public Schools (LPS). Twenty-eight have been in some phase of construction since the school bond issue was approved by the community in 2006 – and that’s nearly 50 percent of all our schools, said Scott Wieskamp, director of Facilities and Maintenance at LPS.

The 2006 bond issue provides funds to build three new schools, rebuild a fourth school and renovate 24, Wieskamp said. This fall, one new school opened, eight projects were complete, three new schools were in process and 16 renovations were underway.

“The breadth of these construction projects is unprecedented – not just in Lincoln, but across the whole state – and we are on time and under budget,” according to Ed Zimmer, Vice President for the Lincoln Board of Education. “We are creating durable, flexible facilities that will provide environments in which our students can grow and learn for years to come. This kind of investment brings rich returns to a community.”

Scott Wieskamp, director of Facilities and Maintenance at LPS, puts the Lincoln Public Schools construction projects into dollars-and-cents perspective.

- When Lincoln Northeast High School was built in 1941, it cost under half a million dollars. The current Northeast project will cost $30 million.
- When Lincoln East High School was built 40 years ago, it cost half a million dollars. The current East project will cost $20 million.
- Lincoln High School, opened in 1915, is “an important piece of architecture in the city. We’re adding green space in front for students, and the building will be lit up at night like the State Capitol.”
- “We’re putting $1.5 million per building into the performing arts at all four high schools,” which includes the auditoriums at East, Lincoln High, Northeast and Lincoln Southeast High School.
- At elementary, middle level and high schools, lower windows that were blocked off during the 1960s and 1970s to save energy, are being eliminated. “We now know natural light is important to teaching and learning,” Wieskamp said.
Adams is community’s first new elementary to open in decade

Adams Elementary School – located in south Lincoln at 7401 Jacobs Creek Drive – opened this fall, the first new elementary school to open in Lincoln in more than a decade. Adams has a capacity for 792 students, and opened with 451. The school is named for long-time Lincoln High School teacher and Tuskegee airman Lt. Col. Paul Adams.

Two additional new elementary schools – Arnold in west Lincoln, and Kooser in north Lincoln – and Schoo Middle School in north Lincoln are all scheduled to open next school year. The new Arnold Elementary, located west of N.W. 48th Street at West Stanton, replaces the existing Arnold, which was built in 1959 as the school for the Lincoln Air Force Base.

The project is a collaboration with the Lincoln City Libraries, and the Lincoln Parks and Recreation Department. The new facility will open fall of 2009 with the capacity of 792.

Kooser Elementary School is located at 14th Street and Alvo Road, and is named for Ted Kooser. Kooser is a Pulitzer Prize winning poet who served as the U.S. Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress from 2004-2006. The new school will open fall of 2009 with a capacity of 792.

Schoo Middle School, located at 700 Penrose Drive, is named for Phil Schoo, Superintendent of Lincoln Public Schools from 1985-2004. The new school will open fall of 2009 with a capacity of 932.

It is also a collaborative project and will serve as the site of the new Fullbrook YMCA, marking the first such collaboration between a YMCA and a middle school in the state of Nebraska.

“These bond issue projects are a powerful reminder both of the community’s unsurpassed support for excellence for our students, and of our rich tradition of excellence at Lincoln Public Schools – a legacy of excellence in learning and instruction, as well as in our classrooms and facilities,” said Keith Prettyman, a member of the Lincoln Board of Education.

For up-to-date information about construction projects at Lincoln Public Schools, check the Web site, www.lps.org.

The official dedication ceremony for Adams Elementary School, 7401 Jacobs Creek Drive (left), is set for 2-4 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 5.

Ed and Mary Copple donated a $1 million lead gift last year to the Foundation for Lincoln Public Schools to build the Ed and Mary Copple Student Athlete Development Center at Seacrest Field. The dedication is set for 6:30-8 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 16.

Status of construction and renovation projects across Lincoln

Ongoing construction and renovation projects at Lincoln Public Schools range from new facilities – to basic improvements in air quality, air conditioning and heating – to extensive additions and renovations.

Additions and renovations posed a unique challenge, said Scott Wieskamp, director of Facilities and Maintenance at LPS. “We wanted the new architecture to look like it was part of the original building.”

Phase one of construction projects:

Elementary Schools
Calvert: Air Quality (Complete)
Campbell: Addition (Complete)
Cavett: Additions (Complete)
Maxey: Additions (Complete)
Pershing: Air Quality (2009)
Roper: Additions (Complete)
Sheridan: Air Quality (Complete)
High Schools
Lincoln High: Air Quality / Additions/ Renovations (2009)
Lincoln Southeast: Air Quality / Additions/Renovations (2008)

Phase two of construction projects (just getting underway):

Elementary Schools
Fredstrom: Additions / Renovations (2009)
Kahoa: Additions / Renovations (2009)
Morley: Additions (2009)
Norwood Park: Air Quality / Additions/Renovations (2009)
Purdy: Additions/Renovations (2009)

Middle Level
Lax: Additions (January / February, 2009)
Scott: Additions (January / February, 2009)

High Schools
East: Air Quality / Additions/ Renovations (2010)
Best and brightest of school district honored in past school year

Scott Bendler, Susan Larson and Carrie Traisy: Teachers at The Bryan Community, among nation’s top educators as 2007 INS Unsumg Heroes.

Deb Biggs, Becky Boswell and Shauna Meyer: Thank You Teacher Contest winners. Biggs is a counselor at Campbell Elementary School; Boswell heads the social studies department at Lyle Middle School; Meyer teaches social studies at Lincoln High School.

Megan Corkern, Allegra Penington and Michelle Hohenfeldt-Spethman: Time Warner Cable National Teacher Award. Corkern is a behavior resource teacher at Dawes Middle School; Penington teaches art and music at Brownell Elementary School; Hohenfeldt-Spethman is an English teacher at Scott Middle School.

Eastridge Elementary School students: Education Environmental Leadership Award, established Green Club.

Angel M. Geller, graduate from Southwest High School, and Benito Sanchez, a senior at Lincoln High School: Mayor’s Arts Award, Artistic Achievement Award for Youth.

Bob Henrichs, director of Theatre at Lincoln Southwest High School, and cast and crew of “Black Elk Speaks:” Inter-Tribal Pow Wow honors presentation’s commitment to civil rights and Native American issues.

Lincoln High School: One of 25 healthiest schools in the nation, School Nutrition Association and the President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sports.


Morley Elementary School, and physical education teacher Karen Ricker: National Association for Sports and Physical Education, STARS school, recognition as one of the elite physical education programs in the country.

Bryan O’Dell and Josh Roth: Information Technology Focus Program students, winners in C-Span Student Cam contest.

Larry Parker: Former Athletic Director at Lincoln High School, State Athletic Administrator of the Year.

Bob Reeker: Art and computer teacher, Eastridge Elementary School, Teacher of Excellence Award.

Cheryl Richter: Fredstrom Elementary School teacher, the Scottish Rite Teacher of the Year.

John Scofield: LPS music teacher and founder of steel drum band, PANGea, Mayor’s Arts Award, Gladys Lux Education Award.

Kristen Smith: Science teacher at Pound Middle School, Teach Award from Best Buy Co.

Jose Welker: Mathematics teacher at Lincoln Southwest High School, Presidential Award for Excellence in Math/Science Teaching.

Mike Worton: Principal at Lincoln High School, State Principal of the Year, Nebraska Association of Secondary Schools.

Bill Zupan: Lincoln High social studies teacher, Walmart Nebraska Teacher of the Year.

Lincoln Public Schools 2007–08 budget focuses on instruction

Instruction is the main priority for Lincoln Public Schools and that fact is reflected in the way the district budgets its money.

More than 83 percent of the 2007-08 general fund budget for LPS targeted instruction costs such as money for teachers, counselors, media specialists, nurses, principals, office staff, paraeducators, supplies and equipment.

The rest of last year’s general fund budget covered additional support necessary to operate a school district, such as maintenance, custodial and transportation costs, human resources and administration.

The Lincoln Board of Education budgeted $277,634,810 for expenditures in the 2007-08 school year. Those funds came from several major sources, including: property taxes, state aid, special education and other state support, federal funds and other local sources.

The Board of Education has approved a 5.6 percent budget increase for the 2008-09 school year which anticipates growth of nearly 600 additional students and the largest enrollment in LPS history.

This budget will cover increasing demands such as:

- Education of more students.
- Operation costs for the new Adams Elementary School.
- Costs to cover the third and final phase of implementing all-day kindergarten in the district.
- Start-up costs for Kooser Elementary and Schoo Middle schools (supplies, textbooks, staff planning and hiring necessary this year).
- Increases in special education due to increased severity of student needs.
- Increased transportation and fuel costs.
- Increased utility costs.

Because of increases in state aid and the school district’s assessed valuation, the district’s 2008-09 property tax levy will decrease slightly.

For more information about Lincoln Public Schools budget check the Web site: www.lps.org/about/budget/