

Strong emotions surround school, reader responses show community cares

Written by Wauneta Breeze

Wednesday, 06 November 2013 22:17 - Last Updated Wednesday, 06 November 2013 22:32

By Sheri Hink-Wagner

The Wauneta Breeze

We've heard several comments at the Breeze since we ran a story about the school's Nebraska State Accountability (NeSA) test results in the Oct. 17 issue.

Comments have varied and although they started off somewhat negative in nature, the majority of them were positive.

The readers who expressed positive comments were not by any means "coming down" on the school. Many of them thanked us for telling the "hard story."

The way I see it, the performance of the local school is an issue for all of us, whether we have kids in school or not. Furthermore, it is the Breeze's job to report on those "hard" issues.

The fact of the matter is that NeSA test scores do matter, whether we like it or not.

Personally, I'm not a fan of standardized tests, I don't think any one test can adequately judge a child (or a school's) potential for success. But, the Department of Education didn't ask for my opinion and the importance of this test remains.

The Breeze does not pass judgement based on NeSA test results or any other topic in our paper. Our job is to report the news in an unbiased, fact-based manner.

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NeSA tests are, unfortunately, the state's yardstick to evaluate schools. That fact may not be popular, but it is a fact.

So, when we report the results of the local school's NeSA scores we are just passing on information.

I attend school board meetings and the most common excuse I hear for W-P's low NeSA test scores is "small school bias."

Small schools, no doubt, face different challenges than do larger schools. However, I've looked at the statewide NeSA test results and small schools can succeed.

Perhaps a better explanation for Wauneta-Palisade's struggles are the 50.96 percent poverty rate, 25.28 percent student mobility rate and 16.83 percent of the student body with special needs.

Studies have shown that any one of these issues can bring down a school's test scores. Combined, they may create a steep uphill battle for the school.

Whatever the reason for W-P's low test scores, I challenge the community to band together for our school and help in finding a solution.

In a column a while back I said that those of us at the paper celebrate as well as mourn with our readers, our community and our school. We also want to be a part of helping to find a solution.

Our business is, rightfully so, extremely closely tied to the community, including the school.

I heard from a number of folks who don't have a child or grandchild in school these days. As tax

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payers they were thankful to know the results.

If I had my way, all the stories in the Breeze would be happy ones...stories of success, new life, successful business and high test scores. Unfortunately, that's just not reality.

When I signed on to serve as editor of the Wauneta Breeze I signed on to tell the truth to the best of my ability—and that's what all of us at the Breeze strive to do.

Occasionally our quest for the truth and unbiased reporting will probably upset a few of our readers and that's ok.

I, for one, would rather we ruffle a few feathers from time to time than print a paper that glosses over the truth or avoids the hard topics.

For that reason, I'd like to extend an open invitation to each and every Breeze reader: If there is something happening in town that you feel your paper needs to cover, please let me know.

I'm always willing to talk with our readers and hear your feedback—good and bad. I can't guarantee we'll be able to run with every story or that we'll change our stance, but I do promise to listen.

So I ask our readers to not be afraid to contact me if you have a concern, a joy, want to find something out or want to share something with the community. We're your newspaper, that's why we're here.