



Newcastle Public Schools

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Good Afternoon Racer Community;

I am writing this letter to communicate to each of you the severity of several issues and challenges that our school district and our state are facing for the upcoming year. Also included are some strategies our district is exploring to address these challenges. Two of the major issues are as follows:

1. There is a great shortage of quality certified teaching staff members available in our state to fill open positions. This is especially true in high need areas such as math, science, and special education. In Newcastle, this has translated to us having to hire multiple staff members who are either not completely certified or who are on emergency certification from the Oklahoma State Department of Education. This emergency certification simply means the teacher candidate has a bachelor's degree in some field and has been given the opportunity to be in a classroom simply by a majority vote of the Oklahoma State Board of Education. They may or may not have any college hours toward teaching. This shortage is expected to continue to get worse in the next few years, therefore forcing districts to either make class sizes go up in certified classrooms, or to put students in a classroom with a less than fully certified teacher.
2. The second great challenge coming our way is the very significant budget deficit that is being predicted by the leadership of the state. Governor Fallin has already told state agencies to prepare for close to a 10% budget cut for the upcoming fiscal year. Newcastle School District would be cut in excess of \$400,000 or in terms of personnel, at least eight (8) and probably closer to ten (10) teaching level positions would be eliminated. If we were to lose just one teacher per grade level at the ECC, Elementary, and Middle School sites as an example, every classroom at each site would gain at least four (4) students per teacher. Larger class sizes equal less one on one time per student which is crucial to educational growth.

Our district has decided to be very proactive in response to these challenges and is in the process of doing research on multiple levels to find solutions. One such alternative that we are pursuing is the option of changing our district to a four day school week. Research has shown the four day week to be very positive in terms of attracting and retaining quality teaching staff, increasing attendance for students and staff, decreasing discipline referrals in numbers and severity, as well as be a cost savings measure for schools, while at the same time not negatively impacting test scores. As districts across the nation have moved to four day week schedules, research has also shown that high quality instruction continues to take place and in many cases there has been an increase in the amount of instructional time that a student actually receives.

As I mentioned earlier, this is simply a research and information gathering project at this point and no decisions have been made. We have asked for input from all of our staff members and are now asking for the input from you as community members, parents, and students. To better inform you, we have posted on our website research and scholarly articles, as well as documents that list the names of school districts across Oklahoma and various other states who are currently using the four day format.

I encourage you to review the documentation prior to completing the survey which is also posted on our website. The survey will be open until 3:00 PM on Thursday, December 10, 2015.

Thank you for your input into our decision making process in Newcastle Schools. We take the responsibility of educating your child very seriously and value your input.

Sincerely,

Tony O'Brien
Superintendent