

PONCA SCHOOL HISTORY

Because it was the first town in the county, Ponca had the first school. It is District No. 1 and goes back to 1859.

Citizens of Ponca and the school district can be proud of their public school system, which is fully accredited institution of learning. Graduates from Ponca High School receive a diploma, which certifies that he or she has finished the full course in the Ponca school and may enter a University or college in the nation.

Since their inception, Ponca School has steadily kept pace with the educational needs of the growing pioneer community. The first school building, in which the handful of pioneer children toiled to master the three R's, reading, 'ritin', and 'rithmetic, was no doubt built of logs. It was built of subscription, the historian informs us, and stood on the north side of the present day school grounds. Miss Mary Jones of Elk Creek, Dakota County, was the first teacher.

Six years slipped by and by then, there was a need for a better school so, in the summer of 1865, the first schoolhouse was sold and removed.

A second larger school building was erected on the same site by Reverend Hugh Bearshear, a minister of the Christian faith, who, having no full congregation, employed his talents as carpenter to supplement his income.

After the close of the Civil War, many of the discharged Union's vets flocked westward in search of new homes and new opportunities. Many of these men located in or near Ponca, thus increasing the town's size. The town's steadily increasing population with more children in school necessitated larger teaching quarters. Therefore, on April 1, 1878, at an election held in Ponca, it was voted to build a new school building at a cost of \$3,000. This school house, a large two story from affair with a tower and clock was completed in September of that year by Leech and Todd. Its main entrance faced east and there was a substantial boardwalk leading from the front door to the sidewalk and was lined with trees.

This commodious building served the town and community as a place of learning for twenty-one years. Year by year, classes increased in size and classrooms became cramped.

It was from this schoolhouse, in May 1886, thirty years after the founding of the town, that Ponca's first twelfth grade graduates proudly stepped forth to meet the world. The students in first class were Mary McKinley, Mary Bigley, Ellen O'Conner and Minnie Skinner Berry. The next year the class of 1887 had three members, Lulu Beller, George Phiello and Harry Welty.

In 1899, there were no graduates as a year of study was added to the curriculum. In the spring and summer of that year, Ponca's fourth schoolhouse was built. This was a magnificent brick and stone structure with a full basement. In the basement was located the manual training rooms, a classroom, the furnace and coal bunkers, storerooms, and toilets. On the main floor was located the first, second, third, and fourth grades, the high schools, and a class or two. On the second floor was situated the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth grade rooms. At the end of the morning and afternoon recesses, the pupils formed by grades outside the schoolhouse doors and marched up the stairs to their various rooms. A Victrola in the lower hall furnished music. The professor's office was located in the head of the flight of stairs in the tower below the belfry. This fine edifice was

destroyed by fire on Sunday afternoon, February 11, 1917. The fire started from wet slack coal in the bunkers situated under the second grade room on the northwest portion of the building. Frozen hydrants hampered fighting the fire and the building was a total loss.

This building was built during the summer and fall of 1917. During construction, school was delayed only two weeks on account of the fire, classes were held in various buildings in Ponca. The first and second grades were quartered in the Baptist Church, the third and fourth in the basement of the Presbyterian Church, the fifth and sixth in the basement of the Methodist Church, the seventh in the opera house, the eighth in the Masonic dining hall, and the high school in the Lutheran Church.

Classes started up in the new building on January 3, 1918. The new building had a small gymnasium where winter athletics, notably basketball could be held. Concerts and other activities were held there also.

As time went on and enrollment of tuition students gradually increased, the need for larger facilities became apparent. In September 1938, a special election was held on the question of voting bonds for a new auditorium to be built adjoining the schoolhouse. The bond issue carried easily and that fall the school board entered into a contract with the Public Work Administration for the erection of a modern, fireproof auditorium. The PWA, a government agency, put up 45% of the cost of the building and the school district 55%. Construction began in March 1939, and the building was completed late in July.

The new auditorium, with a regulation basketball floor, stage, and side bleachers, was dedicated with appropriate exercises in August 1939. Ponca, after a lapse of twenty years when the opera house was discontinued about 1919, again had an adequate public meeting place. This fine auditorium is in use throughout the year and is inestimable value to the community.

Kindergarten classes were started in 1944 with ten students enrolled. A hot lunch program was added in 1960 serving most students each day.

August 14, 1973, the citizens of the district approved a bond issue to build an addition consisting of a gymnasium with seating for 1,100, a stage, dressing rooms, a business classroom, a home economics classroom and a shop classroom. This project was completed in 1974 at a cost of \$295,000. The final payment on the bond was made in July 1993.

From the spring of 1886, the year the first student graduated until today; there have been over 2,500 graduates from Ponca High School. The smallest graduating classes were in 1887 and 1894 when only three students graduated. The largest graduating class to date numbered 48 in 1940.

Reorganization of the past years has increased the size of the district considerable. Class 1 or rural districts which have joined entirely or in part to the Ponca District include Wellenstein #166 in 1971, West Union #23 and Jones #26R in 1975, South Creek #8 in 1976, Waterbury #C-2 and Silvercreek #19 in 1977, Woodland #4 in 1984, Martinsburg #54 in 1987, and Dakota County #6 (Willis) in 1991.

Beginning in 1989, all students from Willis were contracted to Ponca, and that facility housed lower elementary students because of crowded conditions. When Willis joined the district in 1991, approximately \$15,000,000 was added to the tax base. As part of the agreement to join, the Ponca Board of Education increased its members from six to nine, thereby, providing representation from

the Dakota County area. In January 1996, the Board voted to reduce the number back to six members to be elected at large.

In the early 1990's the Nebraska Legislator required all residents of C 1 Nebraska school districts (K-8 schools) to affiliate with a school district affiliated with Ponca increasing not only the valuation of the Ponca School District but also added to the enrollment.

October 19, 1993, the citizens of the district approved a bond issue in the amount of \$1,100,000 to build an elementary addition on the current site consisting of ten classrooms, a library, and administrative offices. Completion date for the addition was November 1994. With the completion of this elementary addition, all students were housed in the main facility and the Willis property was sold back to the original property owner.

During the summer of 1994, an industrial technology building was constructed one block south of the school. The previous shop area was remodeled and used by the instrumental band department. Also that year, land to the west was purchased from Mr. and Mrs. Stan Leigh for use as an elementary playground. Remodeling and renovation of the original facility is underway. The facility is becoming ADA accessible, energy efficient, computer networked, updated to meet fire code and other regulations.

In May 1996, the school district acquired approximately eighteen acres of land from the Judie Davey family. This land is located east of the present football field and is being used for a practice facility for football and track.

The weight room was built in the summer of 1999. It is a 40x30 (approximately) room equipped with free weights as well as aerobic machines, which include a treadmill, stationary bike and stair machine. The patrons of Ponca Public School are welcome to use the room and the equipment and it is open several evenings a week for the public. The room has air conditioning so it can be utilized throughout the year.

The classroom portable was ready for occupancy in August of 2000. This unit has two air-conditioned classrooms and is equipped with restrooms for each classroom. It houses the fourth and fifth grades and allows for additional space in the elementary school for growth and provides space for a full-time kindergarten program. Ponca has had an every-other day for many years. Kindergarten students who attend everyday will be better prepared for first grade and have a better chance to be successful throughout their school careers.

In June of 2002, a facilities study committee was formed to study the current facilities and make recommendations as to future plans. The committee felt that community members needed to visit the facilities and various groups were invited to tour the school. Senior citizens, the Ponca Fire Department, members of the Community Club, local business people and various other individuals attended these tours. The facilities committee recommended to the school board during the fall of 2002 that the board begin to take the necessary steps to investigate the building of a new junior-senior high school. The committee explored possible building sites and urged to the board to begin architect interviews. Those interviews were held during the spring of 2003.

During the 2003-2004 school years, the school board and various committees continued discussions and examinations of various factors for a new school. Both an architectural firm and an engineering firm were hired to participate in the studies. A public meeting was held in November

of 2003 with approximately 150 attending. In January of 2004, the school board voted to proceed with plans for a new junior-senior high school on the land owned by the Curry family. This site was located south of Ponca and east of Highway 12. Detailed plans were drawn and a bond election was presented to the voters in September and was defeated. A second vote was taken in June and it was defeated.

The school district purchased a student management system that began operation in August of 2005. With this system, parents log onto the district's website on their home computers and through a secure log-in, can view their children's grades and assignments in each subject, their attendance and other pertinent information. The system is very user-friendly and will become a key component in communications between parents and the teachers.

Effective June 15, 2006, the Jackson School District was dissolved and was reorganized with the Ponca School District. This was a result of legislation by the Nebraska Unicameral which required all Class 1 school districts (those school districts that included only elementary grades) in Nebraska to reorganize with K-12 districts.

As a result of this reorganization, the teachers and staff at Jackson School became employees of the Ponca Public School District. The three former Jackson School Board members served as an advisory board to the Ponca Superintendent and the Ponca School Board.

2006 – 2007 School Year

The 2006-07 school year saw many changes for the Ponca Public School District. Certified enrollment for the District showed a significant increase to 454 students: 63 students at Jackson; 192 students at Ponca Elementary; and 199 for Ponca Junior-Senior High School. The primary reason for this increase being that this was the first year that Jackson Elementary students were counted as part of Ponca's certified enrollment to the state. As part of this enrollment figure, seventy-six (76) students are attending the Ponca School District under the enrollment options program. This parent choice program continues to be very positive for our district, and we are pleased to have so many families from beyond our borders entrust us with their children.

The start of the school year saw several new members to the teaching faculty for Ponca Schools. Members of the Jackson Elementary faculty were Staci Hill (Kdgn), Kristen DeWald (1st/2nd), Joann Hogan (3rd/4th), Tiffany Lamprecht (Music/PE), LuAnn Petersen (Special Education), and Justin Boeve (5th/6th). New faculty at Ponca were Mary Husen (2nd), Carol Ryan (Special Education), and Troy Evans (PE). At the end of the 2005-06 school year, Phil Wineland retired as Superintendent after ten (10) years of dedicated service to the Ponca School District. William Thompson assumed the position as Superintendent, starting in July, 2006.

There were a great number of student highlights throughout the school year. Junior and senior high school activity programs enjoyed great participation and successful seasons. Athletic teams and the performing arts generated continued interest and support from the Ponca community. In March, the Ponca boys' basketball team won the school's first-ever state championship defeating Oakland-Craig for the C2 state title. Ponca was also awarded the C2 Sportsmanship Trophy at the tournament, for the second year in a row. On May 11, 2007, Ponca High School graduated thirty-four (34) seniors at the school's 122nd annual commencement exercises.

2007 – 2008 SCHOOL YEAR

The 2007-08 school year marks the 121st year of consecutive education under the name of the Ponca Public School District. Serving the communities of Ponca, Jackson, Martinsburg, and Waterbury within the boundaries of the school district, two (2) centers offer educational services to students. Jackson Elementary, with grades kindergarten to 4th grade, had an enrollment of 48 students to start the year. Ponca Elementary, grades kindergarten to 6th grade had an enrollment of 195 students. Ponca Junior-Senior High School, with grades 7-12, started with 199 students. A total of 442 resident and open enrolled students began the school year. This was a decline of twelve (12) students from the previous year's initial enrollment.

On August 16, 2007, District faculty and staff reported back to work for pre-school in-service activities. Mr. Daniel Fritz, secondary science, was the only new member to the teaching faculty for the new school year.

The Ponca Public School District employees a total of seventy-two (72) people on a regular and part-time basis. In addition, ESU specialists and substitute teachers provide support and services to the children of the District. A breakdown of certified faculty and non-certified staff for the District as follows:

<u>Certified:</u>		<u>Non-Certified:</u>	
Administrators	2.5	Board Secretary	1.0
Teaching Faculty	32.5	Building Secretary	3.5
Guidance Counselors	2.0	Bus Drivers	4.0
Media Specialist	1.0	Custodians	7.0
Special Education	4.0	Cooks	6.0
Title I	1.0	Aides	6.0
Technology Specialist	<u>1.0</u>	Nurse	<u>.5</u>
	44.0		28.0

Numerous events and activities throughout the year showcased the talents and abilities of students from all grade levels. One highlight of the year was the performance of "The Wizard of Oz". Students and adults from the community were part of the cast that played to sold-out audiences. In March, the Ponca boys' basketball team again qualified for the state basketball tournament, where they finished in 4th place. Ponca was again awarded the C2 Sportsmanship Trophy at the tournament. This marks the third consecutive year that Ponca has received this honor. No other school in the history of the state tournament can match Ponca's distinction in receiving this award.

On May 9, 2008, Ponca High School graduated thirty (30) seniors at the school's commencement exercises. Mary Kay Mahler, elementary and Spanish teacher, retired at the end of the school year after thirty-three (33) years of dedicated service to the District.

2008 – 2009 SCHOOL YEAR

The 2008-09 school year marks the 122nd year of consecutive education under the name of the Ponca Public School District. Serving the communities of Ponca, Jackson, Martinsburg, and Waterbury within the boundaries of the school district, two (2) centers offer educational services to students. Student enrollment in the District at the beginning of the year was 440 resident and open-enrolled students: high school, 188; Ponca Elementary 135; Jackson Elementary, 117.

The start of the 2008-09 school year saw two (2) significant changes at the elementary level. First was the development of a Pre-School at Jackson Elementary. A total of twenty-five (25) children were enrolled in the program, going to school on an every-other-day basis. Mrs Tamara Schram was the teacher.

The second change was a major shift in the elementary grade patterns hosted by the District's two (2) elementary centers. In previous years, Jackson Elementary held a class for students in kindergarten, and combined classrooms for students in 1st/2nd, 3rd/4th, and 5th/6th grades. Ponca Elementary had class sections for students from kindergarten through the 6th grade. Beginning with the fall of 2008, all District kindergarten, 1st and 2nd grade students attended school at Jackson Elementary. With the addition of the Pre-School, a total of 117 students attended Jackson Elementary.

Ponca Elementary saw a shift from a K-6 center, to a 3-6 building. Each grade level in both buildings served students in two (2) sections each. The 3rd grade sections at Ponca Elementary saw the largest section enrollments with 19 students each at the beginning of the school year. In order to accommodate this transition of grading patterns, the District modified its bus routes to get students to their attendance centers, in addition to running a "shuttle" bus to get Ponca area students to Jackson Elementary each day.

New faculty members for the 2008-09 school year were Mrs Jennifer Hartman, Spanish, and Mrs Terri Sampson, high school science. The end of the school year saw three (3) teachers either retire from education or resign: Fran Poulosky, Art teacher, retired after twenty-two (22) years; Mary Kock, special education teacher, retired; and, Kylee Kephart, 6th grade teacher and girls basketball coach, resigned her positions.

On May 8, 2009, Ponca High School graduated twenty-eight (28) seniors at the school's commencement exercises.

2009 – 2010 SCHOOL YEAR

The 2009-2010 school year marks the 123rd year of consecutive education under the name of Ponca Public School District. The Ponca District serves the communities of Ponca, Jackson, Martinsburg and Waterbury within the boundaries of the school district. There are two educational facilities that serve the district; Jackson Elementary and Ponca. The district student enrollment at the beginning of the year was 441 resident and open enrolled students. Jackson elementary (PK - 2nd) 98 students, Ponca (3rd - 6th grade) 187 students, Junior and Senior High School (7th – 12th) 187 students.

New faculty members for the 2009-2010 school year were Keri Waddle, Art teacher, Meagan (Harris) Pieper, Special Education, Marcus Papenhausen, 6th grade teacher and Head Girls Basketball Coach.

Numerous events and activities throughout the year showcased the talents and abilities of students from all grade levels. Several highlights of the 2009-2010 school year included; the boys varsity football team winning the State Class C-2 Championship game in overtime at Memorial Field in Lincoln, students and adults from the community were part of the cast that performed the Broadway Musical “All Shook Up”, Josh Watchorn became Ponca’s first State Wrestling Champion and Jared Curry won the class C-2 State High Jump for the second year in a row.

On September 15, 2009 a 9.52 million bond issue was passed by the voters of the school district. The bond will be used to build the first phase of the project which includes a 7th – 12th grade educational facility on the block west of the school. The second phase will include remodeling the auditorium, originally built in 1939 for band and vocal music. A new gymnasium for indoor sports and Physical Education will be built in the East courtyard area. Construction began on phase one of the project in the spring of 2010.

At the end of the 2009-2010 school year Joe Kvidera resigned as high school history, government teacher and head football and girls track coach. Kristen Dewald, 2nd grade teacher at Jackson Elementary also resigned. On May 7, 2010 Ponca High School graduated 24 seniors at the school’s commencement ceremony.

2010 – 2011 SCHOOL YEAR

The 2010-11 school year marks the 124th year of consecutive education under the name of the Ponca Public School District. Serving the communities of Ponca, Jackson, Martinsburg, and Waterbury within the boundaries of the school district, two (2) centers offer educational services to students. Student enrollment in the District at the beginning of the year was 436 resident and open-enrolled students: junior & senior high school, 190; Ponca Elementary 131; Jackson Elementary, 92. The enrollment at the District’s pre-school program Jackson Elementary was 23 students. The pre-school program has been supported by the District for three (3) years. Enrollment options for the District saw 76 students opt into the Ponca district, while 28 students chose to opt out of the District.

The 2010-11 school year began with focus on the construction of the new high school building. Students returned to school in August with the steel structure of the building just starting to go up. Watching the developments at the construction site became a daily routine, just to see what had been accomplished from the day before. The construction of the new building over-shadowed any inconveniences created by the construction of the building across the street from Ponca Elementary and Ponca High School. As a result of the construction progress during the year, routines and practices had to be adjusted: the pick-up and delivery site for students riding the bus; students for elementary recess were bused to the park at the west end of town; movement of the portable classroom unit to a site next to the Tech building; combining the elementary and secondary media centers into one room; and movement of elementary classrooms to accommodate construction. These were a few of the more obvious adjustments that had to be made during the year, with many more minor changes made, on what seemed like, a daily basis.

The end of the school year saw secondary teachers moving their classroom furniture, books, and material to their classrooms in the new high school building. Work during the summer months focused on preparing this phase of building construction for the start of classes in August. The summer months also saw the start of construction for Phase II of the high school project. It is anticipated that the entire project will be completed by January, 2012.

New faculty members for the 2010-11 school year were Shannon Roemen, pre-school; and Adam Poulosky, high school social studies. The end of the school saw the following faculty members resign from their teaching duties at Ponca: Shannon Roemen, pre-school; Carla Dickens, elementary; Teri Sampson, high school science; and Kari Waddle, art. The following faculty members have chosen to retire from education at the end of the school year in May: Joann Hogan, elementary (12 Years), William Thompson, Superintendent (5 years); and Dave Watchorn, Industrial Technology (32 years).

On May 13, 2011, Ponca High School graduated thirty-four (34) seniors at commencement exercises.

2011 – 2012 School Year

The 2011-2012 school year marks the 125th year of consecutive education under the name of Ponca Public School District. Ponca Public Schools serves the communities of Ponca, Jackson, Martinsburg, and Waterbury within the boundaries of the school district. There are two educational facilities that serve the district; Jackson Elementary and Ponca. The district student enrollment at the beginning of the year was 432 resident and open enrolled students. The enrollment for each grouping of students is as follows: Jackson Elementary (PK – 2nd grades) 115 students, Ponca (3rd – 6th grades) 129 students, Junior and Senior High School (7th – 12th grades) 188 students.

New faculty members for the 2011-2012 school year were Ryan Olander, Industrial Technology; Mallory Wortmann, Science; Michele Thompson, Art; LeAnn Curry, Kindergarten; and Brady Starkweather, 2nd grade. Head boys basketball coach, Bob Hayes retired from coaching after 32 years. Coach Hayes was the head boys basketball for 22 years and served as assistant boys basketball coach under Coach Steve Semmens for 10 years.

The 2011-2012 school year was the first year that students occupied the new high school classrooms. A “first day of school” portrait was taken by Bobier Studio of South Sioux City on August 17, 2011. The second Phase of the building project is underway with the building of the new gymnasium, locker rooms, vocal music room, along with the renovation of the 1939 gymnasium into the Performing Arts Center.

Some other changes during the 2011-2012 school year were the addition of SmartBoards and LED projectors to 23 elementary and secondary classrooms. The SmartBoards and LED projectors are great technology advancements to the school district. The SchoolReach program is another great technology addition to the school district. SchoolReach is an emergency calling system to alert staff, students, and parents of school dismissal or any other communication that can be made quickly and efficiently.

On May 11, 2012, Ponca High School graduated 29 seniors at commencement exercises. On May 14, 2012, Jackson Elementary graduated 14 pre-school students. On May 15, 2012, Jackson Elementary graduated 34 Kindergarteners.

2012 – 2013 School Year

The 2012-2013 school year marks the 126th year of consecutive education under the name of Ponca Public Schools District. Ponca Public Schools serves the communities of Ponca, Jackson, Martinsburg, and Waterbury within the boundaries of the school district. There are two educational facilities that serve the district; Jackson Elementary and Ponca. The district student enrollment at the beginning of the year was 461 resident and open enrolled students. The enrollment for each grouping

of students is as follows: Jackson Elementary (PK – 2nd grades) 116 students, Ponca Elementary (3rd – 6th grades) 141 students, Junior and Senior High School (7th – 12th grades) 205 students.

New faculty members for the 2012-2013 school year were Tricia Hoffman, Pre-School; Joseph Keefe, Instrumental Music; Adam Simington, 3rd Grade; Jennifer Schindler, 6th Grade; Andrea Stewart, Secondary Special Education; Jessica Templeman, Secondary English; and Margaret Whitmore, Foreign Language-Spanish.

The 2012-2013 school year was the first year that students occupied the new vocal music room, instrumental music Performing Arts Center, gymnasium, weight room and locker rooms. The Performing Arts Center has been used for many activities during the first year of use. Some of the activities include: the Lewis & Clark Conference One-Act Play Productions, the Nebraska School Activities Association District One-Act Play Production, Jr. & Sr. High School Vocal and Instrumental Music Concerts, the Jr. & Sr. High School Honors Program, and the Baccalaureate Ceremony. The Indian head painted on the floor of the gymnasium by Becky Armstrong and Vicki Mabeus Irby was saved.

Some other changes during the 2012-2013 school year was the addition of the FEMA tornado shelter locker rooms. The Ponca Public Schools students and staff members now have a safe area in which they can enter to stay safe during a severe weather outbreak. The weight room allows the opportunity for our youth and community members to improve their health. The new gymnasium and Performing Arts Center has also allowed Ponca Public Schools to host numerous Lewis & Clark Conference and Nebraska School Activities Association District and State activities.

2013 – 2014 School Year

The 2013-2014 school year marks the 127th year of consecutive education under the name of Ponca public Schools District. Ponca Public Schools serves the communities of Ponca, Jackson, Martinsburg, and Waterbury within the boundaries of the school district. There are two educational facilities that serve the district; Jackson Elementary with grades PK – 2 and Ponca with grades 3 – 12. The district student enrollment for resident and option enrolled students at the beginning of the 2013-2014 school year was 451. The enrollment for Jackson Elementary for grades PK – 2 was 119 students, Ponca elementary for grades 3 – 6 was 134 students, and the Junior & Senior High School was 198 students.

New faculty members for the 2013-2014 school year were Samantha Mennenga, Pre-Kindergarten; Kristin Reuter, High School English; and Adam Tranmer, 6th grade.

Some of the experiences of the 2013-2014 school year included Phil Ganz, an Aushwitz survivor speaking to the students, teachers, staff, and patrons about “Erase the Hate”. The Homecoming King Blake Hamar and Queen Abby Hayes were crowned on Saturday, September 14, 2013 while the dance followed the coronation. A snow storm did not allow the Sweetheart King Aaron Carlson and Queen Madison Charleson to be crowned until Tuesday, April 1, 2014.

On May 9, 2014, Ponca High School graduated 26 seniors at the commencement exercises. On May 13th Jackson Elementary graduated 23 pre-school students and on May 14th, Jackson elementary graduated 36 Kindergarteners.

2014 – 2015 School Year

The 2014-2015 school year marked the 129th year of consecutive education under the name of Ponca Public Schools District. The two educational facilities in Ponca and Jackson serve the school district. The district enrollment for resident and option enrolled students at the beginning of the 2014-2015

school year was 463. The enrollment for Jackson Elementary for grades PK – 2 was 123 students, Ponca Elementary for grades 3 – 6 was 128 students, and the Junior & Senior High School was 219 students.

New faculty members for the 2014-2015 school year were Jessica Steckly, Instrumental Music and Lisa Wenger, Art.

Some of the experiences of the 2014-2015 school year included the crowning of Homecoming King Jordan Markworth and Queen Kianna Kramper on Saturday, September 20, 2014 with the dance following the coronation. The vocal music department had 5 All-State musicians including Jacob Bennett, Rachel Bentz, Lexi Eifert, Kianna Kramper, and Alisha Sullivan. Lauren Brickett placed third at the State Speech Meet in which it had been 23 years since Ponca Public Schools had an individual place at the State Speech Meet. The Girls Basketball team also qualified for the Girls State Basketball Tournament through the points system after having a productive winning season. At the State Track Meet, Lexi Eifert placed 4th in the 200 meter race, ending her track career with Ponca Public Schools.

On May 8, 2015, Ponca High School graduated 30 seniors at the commencement exercises. There were 10 full tuition scholarships given out on commencement night. On May 12, 2015 Jackson Elementary graduated 23 Pre-school students and on May 13, 2015, Jackson Elementary graduated 39 Kindergarteners.

2015-2016 School Year

The 2015-2016 school year marked the 130th year of consecutive education under the name of Ponca Public Schools District. The two educational facilities in Ponca and Jackson serve the school district. The district enrollment for resident and option enrolled students at the beginning of the 2015-2016 school year was 457. The enrollment for Jackson Elementary for grades PK – 2 was 115 students, Ponca Elementary for grades 3 – 6 was 130 students, and the Junior & Senior High School was 212 students.

New faculty members for the 2015-2016 school year were David Christensen teaching Jr. High & High School Math, Shannon Jarvi teaching Jr. High Math and Science, and Zane Webb as a 6th grade teacher.

Some of the experiences of the 2015-2016 school year included the crowning of Homecoming King Leo Markworth and Queen MacKenzie Boyle on Saturday, September 12, 2015 with the dance following the coronation. The vocal music department had 6 All-State musicians including Rachel Bentz, MacKenzie Boyle, Kelsea Fethkenher, Rachel Kneifl, Sophie Kramper, Carin Mellick. Alexis Anderson and Kari Rooney placed sixth at the State Speech Meet. At the State Track Meet, Derek Touney placed 1st in the 800 meter race and represented Ponca Public Schools as a State Champion in his junior year.

On May 6, 2016, Ponca High School graduated 25 seniors at the commencement exercises. On May 18, 2016 Jackson Elementary graduated 28 Pre-school students and on May 19, 2016, Jackson Elementary graduated 21 Kindergarteners.

2016-2017 School Year

The district enrollment for resident and option enrolled students at the beginning of the 2016-2017 school year was 459. The enrollment for Jackson Elementary for grades PK – 2 was 119 students,

Ponca Elementary for grades 3 – 6 was 124 students, and the Junior & Senior High School was 216 students.

The new faculty member for the 2016-2017 school year was Katie Keifer as the 2nd grade teacher.

Some of the experiences of the 2016-2017 school year included the crowning of Homecoming King Joel Beacom and Queen Bailie Bodlak on Saturday, September 17, 2016 with the dance following the coronation. The vocal music department had 2 All-State musicians including Rachel Bentz and Carin Mellick. The instrumental music department had 4 Class C All-State musicians including Sam Brickett, Morgan Janssen, Meg Keller, and Carin Mellick.

The Girls' Basketball Team earned a 4th place finish at the Class C2 Nebraska State Girls' Basketball Tournament under the direction of Head Coach Bob Hayes and Assistant Coaches Ryan Olander and Eric Kloke on Saturday, March 4, 2017. The Boys' Basketball Team won the Class C2 Nebraska State Boy's Basketball Tournament under the direction of Head Coach Adam Poulosky and Assistant Coaches Mike Brandt and Trevor Wright on Saturday, March 11, 2017. At the State Track Meet on May 19 & 20, 2017 senior Derek Touney placed 2nd in the 400 meter race and 6th in the 800 meter race. Also at the State Track Meet, the 4 x 400 Relay broke the school record with a time of 3:31.6 and placed 9th at the State Meet. The 4 x 400 Relay members included senior Derek Touney, Junior Connor Day, Junior Dalton Tremayne, and Junior Michael Hegge.

On May 12, 2017, Ponca High School graduated 31 seniors at the commencement exercises. On May 18, 2017 Jackson Elementary graduated 28 Pre-School students and on May 22, 2017, Jackson Elementary graduated 38 Kindergarteners.

The retirement of the certified staff members at the end of the 2016-2017 school year included Beth Foulks, Media Specialist; Kari Lowe, Vocal Music; Joan Reznicek, Superintendent; Michelle Rinas, High School Principal; Carla Taylor, Physical Education; and Peg Whitmore, Spanish.

2017-2018 School Year

The 2017-18 school year was one to remember! The district welcomed 6 new staff members; Mr. Jody Phillips (Superintendent), Mr. Derek Lahm (7-12 Principal), Mrs. Misty Bausch (Spanish), Mrs. Rebecca Irwin (Library Media Specialist), Mr. Kory Pfister (6th Grade), and Mrs. Jessi Walsh (Physical Education). The district's official membership of 468 students (PK-12) was 10 students higher than the 2016-17 school year and one of the highest enrollments in the history of the district. While Ponca had 43 graduating seniors, we had 57 students just beginning their educational journey through school. This included 23 graduating from pre-school and 34 from kindergarten. Some improvements to the district's facilities included a brand-new playground and new carpet in classrooms at Jackson and new exterior security cameras at Ponca.

The beginning of the school year was definitely a time we will all remember. Ponca School students began the year witnessing the Great Solar Eclipse of 2017. Solar Eclipse glasses were secured by secondary Science teacher Mrs. Mallory Wortmann so that all 7-12 students could witness the event first hand. Ponca School students also attended the Ponca Cemetery's Civil War Monument event in celebration of the 105th anniversary of the Monument. Students walked from school to the cemetery to celebrate the special event.

Ponca truly has amazing students. The senior class had 16 students who graduated with honors. There were 31 students who received at least one scholarship and many of these students received more than

one scholarship. Samuel Brickett, senior, was named a National Merit Finalist, one of only 7,500 students across the United States to achieve this prestigious honor. In addition to this highly accomplished senior class, Ponca High School also had 59 students make the “A” Honor Roll throughout the 2017-18 school year.

Just as the school year started off as one to remember, it continued with many accomplishments from students involved in Ponca athletics and Fine Arts. Below is a list of athletic and extracurricular accomplishments for the 2017-18 school year:

Athletics

- Started 1st year of Cross Country with only 3-4 students starting the season and 10 competing by the end of the season
- Started 1st year of Softball and ended the season as Class C-4 district runner-up
- Football team finished regular season 9-0 earning the Class C2-4 district championship, making it to the state quarterfinals
- Volleyball won the Lewis and Clark Conference Championship and Class C2-4 district championship, qualifying for the state tournament in Lincoln
- 2 wrestlers qualified for the state tournament in Omaha
- Boys basketball team won the Wisner Holiday Tournament, the Lewis and Clark Conference Tournament, and the Class C2-5 district championship. They ended the season as State Champions for the 2nd year in a row
- Girls basketball team won the Wisner Holiday Basketball Tournament and the Lewis and Clark Conference Championship finishing the season as the Class C2-5 district runner-up
- Track & Field had 7 students qualify for the state track meet in Omaha

Fine Arts

- Top 6 finish for a speech team member in district speech meet
- 3 All State Vocal Music qualifiers
- 19 All State Instrumental qualifiers
- 3 best of categories at the Lewis & Clark Art Show
- 1 best in show at Lewis & Clark Art Show and the Wakefield Big Show
- Outstanding community musical of “Back to the 80s” performed by many talented Ponca students and community members
- Concert Band, Mixed Chorus, and Jazz Band earned superior ratings at the district music contest and Show Choir earned an excellent rating
- 10 instrumental soloists, duets, and ensembles earned superior ratings and 3 earned excellent ratings at district music

As one can see, this truly was a year to remember for Ponca students and staff. So many accomplishments in and out of the classroom. The Ponca school community has so much to be proud of and a bright future to look forward to!

2018-2019 School Year

The 2018-2019 school year was another fantastic year in the Ponca Public Schools! Once again, the enrollment for the year was 465. Jackson School’s enrollment was 122 students, Ponca Elementary, grades 3-6, was 133, and the Junior/Senior High School was 211 students.

New faculty members for the 2018-2019 school year were Ms. Dacia Beyke, Family & Consumer Science, and Mrs. Jill Camargo, Spanish. Mrs. Kari Lowe returned to the district serving as a cooperating teacher in Family and Consumer Science.

Some of the experiences of the 2018-2019 school year included the crowning of Homecoming King Joel Anderson and Queen Taylor Lamprecht on Saturday, October 6, 2018, with the dance following the coronation. The Snowball dance was held on Saturday, January 5, 2019, with Gage McGill being crowned King and Hailey Bellows crowned Queen. Ponca High School, along with the majority of Northeast Nebraska experienced flooding on March 13, 2019. Staff and students all contributed to the cleanup and rearranging of classes while the building was repaired for normal use. Six classrooms and the Library were displaced for three weeks during repairs.

The students of the Ponca Public School District continued the tradition of excellence in the areas of academics, fine arts, and athletics. The vocal music department had three All-State musicians including: Colson Watchorn, Claire Hoelsing, and Olivia Hrouda. The instrumental music department qualified a record 23 7th-12th grade students for Class C All-State Band. The art department celebrated many awards and recognitions, including back-to-back Best of Show Awards by Katy Kastning, at the Lewis & Clark Conference Art Show. The Ponca High School Quiz Bowl varsity team earned the Lewis & Clark Conference Championship on November 8, 2018. Cora Jackson, 5th grade, earned first place in the Dixon County Spelling Bee held in Allen on February 13, 2019. With her first place finish, Cora earned a trip to the state Spelling Bee contest held in Omaha. Sophomore Josie Reid was named a World Language Distinguished Scholar in Spanish. Sophomores Brandon Mellick and Caden Schram represented Ponca School at the Hugh O'Brien Youth Leadership Conference (HOBY) at Concordia University in Seward, Nebraska. Daityn Chase was selected to attend Junior Law Cadet Academy at the Law Enforcement Training Center in Grand Island, Nebraska. Junior Nathan Ruhrer was selected as the 2019 Cornhusker Boys State representative in Lincoln, Nebraska. Nebraska Governor Pete Ricketts served as the guest speaker at this year's Veteran's Day program at Ponca School.

The 2018-2019 school year marked the first year of Unified Bowling at Ponca High School. The Unified Bowling team, offered in association with Unified Sports and the Nebraska State Activities Association, was coached by Mr. John Stroud. The volleyball team won the Lewis & Clark Conference regular season championship. The Girls Basketball team won the Lewis & Clark Conference regular season championship, tournament championship, District championship, and earned a trip to the 2019 state tournament held Thursday, February 28, 2019. The Boys Basketball team won the Lewis & Clark Conference regular season championship, District championship, and earned a trip to the 2019 state tournament held March 7-9, 2019, where they earned 3rd place. The Wrestling team qualified two wrestlers, Dalton Anderson and Andrew Daily, for the state tournament, held February 14-16, 2019 in Omaha. At the Lewis & Clark Conference track meet, Mike Logue and Brooke Lanquis earned conference champions in the shot put and the girls 4x400 relay team (Kaci Day, Kai Seneviratne, Kortney Fethkenher, and Hannah Wahls) were also crowned champions. The track team qualified six athletes for the state track meet held in Omaha. Brooke Lanquis came home with a 7th place finish in the girls Class C shot put. The boys golf team finished 2nd in the Lewis & Clark Conference tournament held in Plainview. Golf districts was held at Fair Play Golf Course in Norfolk. Senior Cole Richards qualified for the state golf tournament, held in Kearney.

On May 10, 2019, Ponca High School graduated 34 seniors at the commencement exercises.