

Ray Patterson :
Superintendent :
Mindy Salmans :
Principal :
Sue Pelton, AD :

203 N West St – P O Box 219
Hanston KS 67849-0219
Phone 620 623-2611 Fax 620 623-4488
E-mail hsoffice@usd228.net

HANSTON HIGH SCHOOL

Friday, September 09, 2005

Dear Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns,

In the spring of 1960, Hanston High School received a National FFA Charter. This was the beginning of an active agricultural education for Eastern Hodgeman County in the rural Southwest area of the state. Forty five years later, on June 4, 2005, the Hanston FFA Chapter attended its last official function at the Kansas FFA Convention in Manhattan, KS. Was it because of a lack of interested students or perhaps because of an inactive chapter? No, the reason was because of a declining enrollment and lack of a certified agricultural teacher.

Hanston, Kansas, located 40 minutes northeast of Dodge City, is a sample of wholesome rural living. A proud community, of just over 200, centers their support around the school. The community believes in its teachers and students and bigheartedly gives to its area youth through local contributions of time, encouragement and financial commitment. The tradition of outstanding sports is undeniable. The school has attained six state 8-man football championships within the last 25 years, along with four state basketball championships and several state placings in track. The community is proud of their football coach who is the all time national leader with 250 high school football victories. In addition, Hanston boasts of over 90% of their students pursuing higher education upon high school graduation with many students achieving scholastic honors including National Merit finalist, semi-finalist and commended status. The school and community believes in the philosophy of what is best for their children; including a professional, caring staff; small class sizes and quality instructional time which all combine for excellence in education and an outstanding foundation for life.

Hanston FFA has been a huge part of this rural based school. Twenty five percent of the student body has been involved in the chapter. In the four years that I have been the FFA Advisor, we have attained The Superior National Chapter Award every year. At the state level, we have been awarded Silver and Bronze awards in the areas of Student, Chapter, Community and Safety. The wall is lined with

Educating is our Business!

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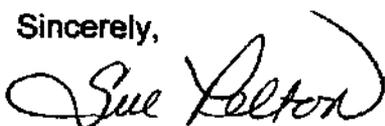
plaques that have been won in our Southwest District Career Development Events. In addition, we have been very active in both the school functions and within the community trying to give back to the many friends and neighbors that have been dedicated to us. We have had Southwest District Officers for the last several years and have given out several thousands of dollars in scholarships along with helping the members get scholarships from post-high school education institutions.

I was hired the week before school started in the fall of 2001 to temporally replace the leaving agricultural teacher. While not having a teaching certificate in agriculture, I took ag classes at Kansas State University and am very active, having held several offices, in numerous national and state agricultural organizations. While a number of certified agricultural teachers were interviewed for the teaching position within the last three years, none accepted the position because of the "writing on the wall"—the school's dramatically declining in enrollment. The "writing on the wall" became "ink on the paper," and Hanston High School will close its doors at the end of this year. Pawnee Heights graciously consented to a contractual agreement between the two school districts. Starting in the fall of 2006, the grade school will be held in Burdett, the middle school in Hanston and the high school in Rozel, all under the heading of Pawnee Heights.

So why did the Hanston FFA Chapter lose its charter with only one year to go? The charter was lost because of the lack of a certified agricultural teacher. The National FFA requires all of its advisors to be ag certified. At the present, there are not enough of these certified teachers to fill the necessary positions. Several of the state's chapters are in the same position that the Hanston FFA was in—non-ag certified advisors. A grace time is given to find the compliant instructors, however, the number of openings exceeds the number of certified individuals. Thus, chapters and agricultural classes will be closing in an alarming rate throughout the state.

What can be done about this? Agriculture should be promoted as an important part of our lives with nearly all things based on it. (Take a drive down a city street and look around at all the businesses that are based, at least in a part, on agriculture. It is hard to find one that is not related to ag somehow.) Ag should be trumped as a many faceted opportunity, not just farming (production) as it is commonly thought. We need to let students know about the many, many career opportunities that are open in agriculture and for the desperate need to fulfill these positions. The world can not survive without agriculture, and we need to let it be known through education. We can NOT lose our agricultural programs or else we lose an important part of America.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sue Pelton". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the right of the word "Sincerely,".

Sue Pelton
Agriculture Science Instructor, Hanston High School

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