

Hoisington High School takes a beating; will require major repair

(This article was originally printed in the April 26, 2001 edition of the Dispatch).

Hoisington High School took the worst the Saturday night tornado had to offer. The nearly 70-year old structure is severely battered and bruised, but can be used with a lot of repair.

During a brief Tuesday morning news conference, USD 431 Superintendent Randy Evans said a structural engineer had gone through the building thoroughly and said the main part was not structurally unsound. It has not been condemned, despite reports in other media.

Work started Tuesday to board up windows and work on the roof to make the building watertight. After that, the cleanup process can start and the district can get a price tag on what it will cost to repair the building.

It won't be cheap, but the district is well covered by insurance. The district is insured for the replacement cost of the buildings, and, ironically, had added coverage to the high school this year. The district has only a \$1,000 deductible.

However, there are some items that aren't covered – that you never would think would be destroyed. Federal grants will be sought to help pay for items such as the goal post arms. Evans said he was told the football field sod

would be completely replaced because all the debris can never be completely removed, and federal money would pay for that.

The board of education may have to make a decision. Will the costs to repair the high school be so great that it would be cheaper to build a completely new building? They won't have to face that question for several weeks, however.

The HHS auditorium was severely damaged, some trusses in the roof will have to be replaced and the roof replaced. The seats are unusable, and it will take a lot of other repair, but the auditorium could be restored.

The west wall of the art room collapsed during the storm and that will have to be replaced.

Damage was also done to the gym, but that can also be repaired. As of Tuesday morning, Evans said he hadn't been in the music room or the shop building. The shop building, a metal structure on the east side of the school, appeared to be severely damaged. Most of the windows and doors to the building were broken and there is a lot of dirt and other debris inside the school. But structurally the building can be restored, with a lot of work, the engineer said.

The school can't open tomorrow. What do students do for the remaining month of the school year? Evans said there are several options. The other school



The Hoisington tornado damaged the high school, a small shopping center, the hospital and hundreds of homes in a matter of minutes. (photo by Dave Saville/FEMA News)

buildings in the district sustained little, if any, damage. One option is to work with the three churches located around the Hoisington Middle School – using them for classrooms. That way the high school students could eat lunch at the middle school and utilize other special rooms such as music at HMS. For science and computer classes, an option would be to work with Barton County Community College. Plans are still being worked on.

Of course, if a new school had to be built, arrangements would need to be made for 1 1/2 to two

years before the building would be finished.

Four buses were damaged along with three smaller vehicles. Other districts have volunteered to let Hoisington use buses.

High school seniors may not end the year with enough hours to meet minimum state requirements. The state requires a minimum of 1116 hours and the district calendar includes several extra days for snow days or other problems. The district already lost some days to weather and students may not have the minimum number of

hours. Sen. Janis Lee and Rep. Bob Bethell will introduce legislation to allow USD 431 seniors to graduate with fewer than the minimum number of hours due to extreme circumstances. That was done in Andover a few years ago and Evans anticipated no problem.

In November voters approved a bond issue for a new cafeteria and science lab, along with infrastructure improvements to the high school. Can the bond issue money be combined with the insurance money to do something? As long as the district provides what voters approved, the bond money could be used with insurance money, Evans said.

Special education students were transported to classes in Great Bend starting Tuesday. Grades kindergarten through eight can start within 24 hours of electricity being restored to the middle school. The middle school is also the central kitchen. The food was removed and stored in refrigerated trucks donated by Dillons, Evans said. After the electricity is back on, the food can be returned and the kitchen can operate.

Tuesday morning, it was unknown when electricity would be restored, but hopefully by the end of the week or first part of next week.

Then USD 431 and the students can start to get back to normal.

Letters to the editor

(The following letters to the editor were printed in the Dispatch in the weeks and months following the tornado).

To the Editor:
Things I learned from the F-4:
I learned that Hoisington has heroes, big and small.
Tornadoes do weird things.
In an emergency, Hoisington people pull on the same kind of rope.
In an emergency, there are no strangers in town.
We have a sense of humor.
We have a sense of community.
None of us like looters.
Teenagers are not all bad.
What compassion means.
Teenagers do know what work is.
What we as a town have in common.
People in surrounding towns do care.
What it feels like to live under a microscope.
What it means to not have a grocery store.
That law enforcement officers are about more than just making arrests.
Why we have a Na-

tional Guard in peacetime.
Trees look funny without skin.
What cars look like when they climb trees.
How quickly chaos can turn to order.
That family matters – even if it's not your family.
What trees look like upside down.
That permanent siding isn't.
That new paint can peel.
That grass is still green in the radiator of your car.
Lawn mowers can move by themselves.
How much you can miss not having a DQ Blizzard.
Hospitals mean more when you need them.
I have more friends than I thought.
Material things don't mean much.
What it feels like to be in a war zone.
How much a hug means.
Cleanup week can take on a whole new meaning.
Fifteen minutes of fame can be much over rated.
Planes aren't the only things that can fly.
Great Bend High students have a lot of heart.
If you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem.
Last but not least

– How proud I am to live in Hoisington.

Thomas J. Rose
May 10, 2001

Citizens of Hoisington: I feel I should communicate some of my ideas and thoughts as a council member and local citizen.
This recent tornado has pushed us into some decisions in some time frames that nobody anticipated. I think the goals of all of us are very similar. The future of our town lies in the school, hospital and business community. If I want to attract a new young urologist to assume this practice when I am done (no time frame in mind) that will add to our community and protect this hospital, I will have to show him a great school system and facility. A community center would be a significant attractor also. The wellbeing of their children and educational opportunities will be critical in the decision-making process. I think that school consolidation is eminent, and the best schools (we need to upgrade our science dept.) will survive and prosper.
Do I think this will be uncomfortably expensive

and a burden to our citizens on fixed incomes? Absolutely, I do. As a 61 year old in the twilight of a mediocre career with no children in this school system, I understand. I genuinely admire and respect and honor the ingenuity, strength, diligence and sacrifice of those who have done so much to make Hoisington what it is. That was no small thing. I will search for and provide all the assistance in my power for anyone who is excessively burdened by this process. Just like those heroes did in their time.
The zoning and lot repair regulations are tedious and are going to change the number of homes in some blocks and probably eliminate some rebuilding in some areas. I wish the settlers of Hoisington had not gotten over this flood plain. The zoning and planning commission and the council will help with variances if possible and

assist everyone we can in every legal effort. An empty town with perfect zoning is perfectly empty. Please know that each council member represents and will intercede on behalf of those people who elected us.

I will support either a tax or utility abatement for the first 10 or 15 homes that are rebuilt. I love this little town. It has been my experience that communication and dialogue are the boiling elements that bring truth and unity of purpose to the surface. Everybody listen to everybody, and then let's work together to make it the very best that we can. We have witnessed the beauty of helping by being helped so much by so many. We may never again, have this window of opportunity to make Hoisington the best we can – let's don't screw it up.

Dr. Dan Witt
May 17, 2001

Open Letter to the People of Kansas:

I'm proud to be a Kansan.
God let us live and the good people of Kansas made us proud to be a part of such generous and caring people.
The outpouring of love, labor, and sacrifice for the victims was overwhelming. I would truly like to thank the volunteers, business groups, heavy equipment owners, Red Cross, Salvation Army, Mennonites, 7th Day Adventists, Church of Christ, LDS, surrounding cities, students, prisoners, Dillon's, Wal-Mart, FEMA, SBA, and so many more.
I have no tears for what was lost – just a full heart for what I have gained. God is good. I say again – I'm proud to be a Kansan.

Lloyd Jaynes
May 24, 2001



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