



The Journal

Wednesday,
September 4, 2013

International Falls, Minnesota www.ifallsjournal.com \$1

The results are in: School officials pleased with test scores

Falls makes AYP for second year in a row

BY EMILY GEDDE
Staff Writer

International Falls students took their teachers seriously last spring when they were encouraged to “rock the test.”

While district scores of the 2013 Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment tests fell just short of the state averages, Superintendent Nurdy Nelson said the district met Adequate Yearly Progress, or AYP, and he was pleased with the performance of students.

“I was very excited for the students and the district,” Nelson

said of his reaction to the MCA results.

The Minnesota Department of Education last week released scores for the yearly tests, which are required by state and federal law and used as one tool to help schools gauge students’ progress in meeting expectations on state standards for reading, math and science. State averages combined scores from all levels of schools in a district.

This past year was a first for Minnesota students and schools taking a new reading test aligned to career- and college-ready standards, and more than 95 percent of students taking their math test online.

“We can be proud of the fact

that Minnesota is a pioneer in setting high expectations for students, and in using online testing that give more timely information to teachers and parents,” said Education Commissioner Brenda Cassellius in the release. “It’s important to look at tests results for what they are: a snapshot in time that tells us how students are doing in mastering our state standards. What is needed now is to focus our efforts and stop moving the goal posts so teachers and students have a consistent target to hit.”

This was the first year students took new tests based on more challenging reading standards. Minnesota adopted more rigorous standards to help boost student

achievement and better ensure students are career and college ready following high school graduation.

Just a little more than half of third through eighth and 10th grade students met or exceeded state expectations on the new reading test. As a district, International Falls students scored 53.5 percent on the reading test, coming in just under the state average of 57.8 percent.

At the elementary level, Falls students scored 51.4 percent and at the secondary level, students scored 56.3 percent.

New this year was how Minnesota students were tested on their math skills.

In 2012, students who took the

More information

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MCA III math test were given the option of taking the online test up to three times and using their highest score. In 2013, the state’s flexibility waiver from No Child Left Behind required MDE to provide students with only one opportunity to take the test, one likely reason for the slight dip in this year’s math scores.

International Falls students scored 56.6 percent on the math

MCA to A7 ➤



STAFF PHOTOS BY SPENSER BICKETT

Falls Elementary paraprofessional Rhonda Johnson helps kids file off the bus Tuesday morning for the start of the 2013-2014 school year.

Back in action

BY SPENSER BICKETT
Staff Writer

Area kids lamented the end of summer vacation and returned to school on Tuesday. Teenagers trudged into Falls High School for the beginning of another school year, and children gathered in front of Falls Elementary School to find out what classrooms they’d be in this year.

SEE MORE SCHOOL PHOTOS ON **B10**.



Students enter Falls High School Tuesday morning the the start of classes.

Planning for Donahue property begins Sept. 11

Series of meetings intended to gather input on what to do with 122 acres

BY LAUREL BEAGER
Editor

The future of land known as the Donahue property provided to International Falls in 2009 is the

focus of a public planning process scheduled to start with a meeting Sept. 11.

The process will involve a series of meetings, scheduled for Sept. 11 and 25, and Oct. 9 and 23. Each of the meetings are to begin at 6:30 p.m. at the AmericInn and be led by Andy Hubley, senior planner with the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission. The meetings are being held in the fall to allow the greatest number of people to attend.

Public input about the property gathered during the four meetings is expected to be compiled into a report in December.

Shawn Mason, Falls economic and community development director, said members of the Donahue family are expected to attend, and to provide complimentary beverages and appetizers at the Sept. 11 session.

The 122-acre Donahue property

Donahue to A7 ➤

Labor Day picnic sees biggest turnout yet

BY EMILY GEDDE
Staff Writer

Smokey Bear Park was alive with community spirit Monday as hundreds – maybe even thousands – of people gathered for the annual Labor Day picnic.

The third annual event co-sponsored by the Koochiching Labor Assembly and the city of International Falls, was bigger and better than previous years according to Mike Holden, president of the assembly.

“It was unbelievable,” Holden told The Journal Tuesday.

Holden said picnic organizers prepared for about 1,500 people, but volunteers went through at least 2,000 hot dog buns, he said.

“I think there was at least 2,000 people or more,” he said.

The resurrected picnic is a return to the worker pride that the community celebrated in the 1950s with Labor Day picnics that drew thousands of people and included parades, food, and fun. This year, Holden said in addition to the food, entertainment and more kid-friendly attractions were included.

“Everyone had a great time,” he said of the picnic for all members of the community, not just union workers. “The kids had a bounce house, barrel train and tractor rides. It was a great day.”

This year’s food was cooked on a grill donated by the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Union Local 294 out of Hibbing. Holden said the union wanted the International Falls community to use the grill for the event.

“Some of the (IBEW union) members are working on the Good Samaritan Society (International Falls) building,” Holden said. “They went to pick up the grill and will bring it



STAFF PHOTOS BY EMILY GEDDE

A young Labor Day picnic goer enjoys corn on the cob at Monday’s third annual event at Smokey Bear Park.

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back. It was much appreciated.”

While Holden has spearheaded the picnic committee in the past, this year Joe Schwartz was delegated for the part.

“Joe did a phenomenal job,” Holden said.

The labor assembly president said he couldn’t forget to give a shout out to the weather.

“It was absolutely beautiful,” he said, noting the Labor Day weekend weather was rainy and cold. “We didn’t know what to expect.”

The community appeared to agree. Smiles were seen on many faces as people congregated for good food, company and weather.



Members of many local unions volunteered at Monday’s picnic.