

MCA

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When preparing for this year's tests, Grover said the district set its focus on math, which showed an increase. As a district, students had a proficiency rating of 61.1 percent – just above the state average of 60.5 percent.

Next year, the focus will shift toward reading. Students in Falls schools were 55.3 percent proficient, just below the rest of the state at 58.8 percent.

“We’re going to try to bring more reading into other classrooms this year,” Grover said. “Teachers won’t be teaching just reading, but they’ll be making a conscientious effort to focus on that certain area and even taking it a step further by looking at if there are a small group of students that teachers can make more of an effort on.”

In science, the district’s results show of the 246 students tested, 85 or 34.6 percent, were proficient. The state’s average was 53.4 percent.

Grover said it’s hard to compare this year’s test scores to previous years because there are multiple factors that tie into results.

“It is a different group of kids in each grade year-to-year,” he said. “It is growth at each grade level, but it depends on if you try tracking individual kids.”

On the same note, Grover said the district’s new schedule of releasing students an hour early every Wednesday afternoon will allow staff to meet as a whole and analyze data.

“Our focus starting out is for each grade and each teacher to look at individual students,” he said of the early release. “Teachers will work together to see where students struggled last year and how they can improve this year. A good chunk of the time will be dedicated to look at the data and work on strategies to work together and help each other. We have to work together, we all have strengths. It’s a start and hopefully it’ll be successful.”

Grover said the district will continue to keep kids motivated and encourage them to do the best they can on these tests and day-to-day learning.

“Sitting here next year, hopefully we’ll see that all areas made growth,” he said. “We are focused on learning and looking at standards across the board, making sure (standards) are aligned, setting goals and seeing where we can improve. Hopefully, our numbers will keep climbing.”

Littlefork-Big Falls

Littlefork-Big Falls Superintendent Christopher Bachmeier was pleased with how the district performed on the tests.

“I feel as a school district, we did very well,” he said.

He explained more than 65 percent of L-BF students are meeting or exceeding the state standard in math and 60 percent are showing the same for reading.

“I am very pleased with our effort and what is taking place in the classroom,” he said. “Our students and our teachers work very hard during the school year, and I

believe that our test results show that.”

The superintendent said the district challenges itself to stay on track with the school’s tradition of meeting and exceeding state standards on the MCA tests.

As a district, 58.9 percent were proficient in reading, just above the rest of the state at 58.8 percent; 64 percent of L-BF students were proficient in math above the rest of the state at 60.5 percent; in science, 47.9 percent were proficient, below the rest of the state at 53.4 percent.

“When I look at the results, I can confidently say our students have kept the Littlefork-Big Falls tradition of succeeding on state tests alive,” Bachmeier said.

Similar to the Falls district, Bachmeier said this year, L-BF teachers will focus on raising students’ reading scores by supplementing the reading curriculum with more chapter books. By doing so, Bachmeier said he believes students will get more excited about reading and will allow teachers to implement different materials in their classroom that wasn’t available for group instruction before.

“We always would like to see our scores in reading improve,” he said. “I believe that reading plays on of the biggest roles in successful education. I have seen that when students are good readers, all of the other subjects they learn come easier as well.”

Bachmeier concluded it is his belief when people look at test scores they question what can be changed or what

new program can be implemented in order for students to succeed.

“As a leader at Littlefork-Big Falls Schools, we put a majority of our stock into the people side of education,” he said. “We believe that programs succeed because of the people and not because of the program. Our school is successful because of the people we have in our system.”

South Koochiching — Rainy River

In the South Koochiching-Rainy River School District, which consists of Indus and Northome schools, Superintendent Martin Avelsgaard said they’re never going to be satisfied with their test scores.

“In any grade level, you should be showing progress year by year, and taking small steps,” Avelsgaard said. He declined to make further comment on the scores, and instead directed questions to the school’s principals.

In Northome, Principal Travis Hensch said he wasn’t surprised to see the scores, as the teachers do a good job of tracking students’ growth throughout the year. However, he said he was disappointed because the scores don’t show an accurate measure of the students’ growth.

“It’s just a snapshot of one day from the whole school year,” Hensch said. “We have no idea what kind of factors might impact a student on that one day.”

At the elementary level, students taking the math test scored 52.1 percent; the state average is 60.5 percent. At the secondary level, math

scores were at 51.1 percent.

The reading portion of the test had a state average of 58.8 percent. Northome elementary students scored 45.7 percent and secondary students scored 39.1 percent.

Science scores were 52.4 percent at the elementary level for Northome students and 36.7 percent at the secondary level. The state average came in at 53.4 percent.

Hensch said the MCA scores “don’t do a good job of reflecting students’ abilities,” but when combined with the other tests they administer to their students, a fuller picture emerges.

“We triangulate all of our data to get a more accurate picture of our students,” he said. “We’re not going to ignore it, but we look at all the data.”

A good educator is always looking to improve, Hensch said, and because of that, the school’s staff is evaluating the math curriculum to make sure it aligns with the tests they’re administering. They’ve also implemented a reading initiative focusing on struggling students, allowing them to evaluate students week-to-week to gauge their growth.

“In education, if you don’t think you can improve, you’re in the wrong place,” Hensch said. “We’re always looking to be better.”

Indus School Principal Michael Underwood said his initial reaction to seeing his school’s scores was mixed.

“It was a combination of recognizing we’ve made improvements in my first year here going into my second year,” he said. “But I also

recognize we’ve got a ways to go in some areas.”

At the elementary level, math scores were 45 percent, below the state average of 60.5 percent. At the secondary level, scores were 39.4 percent.

Reading scores at the elementary level at the Indus School were 34.1 percent, with the state average at 58.8 percent. At the secondary level, scores were 35.3 percent.

Elementary students recorded a science score of 33.3 percent, below the state average of 53.4 percent. Secondary students scored 16.7 percent.

Underwood said the district’s smaller enrollment can play a factor in skewing test results in a positive or negative direction.

“One or two kids can make or break a class,” he said.

One benefit to smaller class sizes is more individual student attention, which Underwood said will continue to be the school’s focus, specifically in reading and math.

“We try to build basic foundational skills so we can grow them to proficiency levels, through their daily class work and individual assessments,” he said.

Data from the MCAs are used to determine the Multiple Measurement’s Ratings, the state’s system of accountability to the federal government, allowed under the recently-extended federal waiver from the No Child Left Behind Act. Those results will be released Oct. 1.

Staff writer Spenser Bickett contributed to this report.

ASSOCIATION

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that they have,” Dougherty said.

An informational meeting to gauge interest in forming an organization was held Aug. 6 in Ranier on what Dougherty described as among the summer’s first beautiful boating days on the lake. He said interest was clear when about 110 people attended instead of heading to the lake.

“The one thing we didn’t want to have happen was it turn into a session where everybody was complaining,” he said. And he said it did not.

Instead, he said people volunteered to serve on a steering committee to help organize. The steering committee is made up of Jim Yount, Tony Nagurski, Tom Smith, Georgia Growette, Billy Dougherty, Steve Lindberg, Joanne Finstead, Mike Hogan, Sherril Gautreaux, and Dale Johnson, “a very diverse group of people with tons of knowledge, tons of

expertise and a lot of energy going forward to form the group,” Dougherty said.

A temporary board was put in place, which drafted bylaws and handled other details of the organization. The bylaws include a mission statement, which says the group “is to promote, represent and protect property and riparian rights on the shore of Rainy Lake and the upper Rainy River (the portion upstream from the International Falls dam).”

Dougherty said it was important to harness the energy created by the flooding issues by soon forming the Rainy Lake Property Owners Association. He said he found it strange that such a group has never been successfully organized before.

Many of Minnesota’s lakes have such organizations including the Lake of the Woods Property Owners Association, which formed in the 1950s, has 4,000 members and a \$160,000 budget, he said.

Nagurski told The Journal via telephone he was interested in establishing the

group because of the flood and the damage to his property it caused. Organizing the group is long overdue, he added.

“There is a number of existing organizations in the Rainy Lake area, but none of those really represent our rights and our situation as property owners,” he said.

Nagurski said the handling of the water levels during the flood led he and others to realize “the IJC (International Joint Commission) and their water board doesn’t really care about the property owners on Rainy Lake. They’re more concerned about Boise (Paper, a Packaging Corporation of America company) and other things they’re involved with.”

Nagurski said the association members are concerned about what happens on Rainy Lake and need to, as an organization, coordinate with other groups to get their voice heard.

Yount, who has lived on the shore of Rainy Lake for about 12 years, said he was motivated to get involved by

several things. He joined a community advisory group established by the local watershed board and IJC, he said.

“A lot of the other watersheds (have property owners associations already organized) and have an effective, coherent organized voice when speaking to the watershed board and our area doesn’t really have that,” Yount said. “Although I think they’re willing to hear what we have to say, it’s more effective to speak among ourselves first before we speak with them, and that allows us to have a more proper balance of our interests in all the factors they have to consider.”

The expertise among the association members will allow it to evaluate things like the water levels, how the rule curve is determined, and what changes might be considered, he said. The association can then present the information to the IJC and watershed board for consideration.

“We’ll see how open they actually are when this rule

curve review goes through,” Yount said. “They’re the only watershed board in the entire U.S.-Canadian border governed by the IJC to have those two advisory groups.”

Dougherty said while rain is an act of God, at issue is how the dams are controlled to manage the water levels. He said he believes action to control the water levels was needed more quickly this summer than it happened.

Yount added that the po-

tential for flooding will never be eliminated, but the association members want to be sure that what can be done to manage huge amounts of rain to best avoid flooding is being done.

Meanwhile, the association is also expected to address other Rainy Lake issues, said Dougherty. Those issues could include invasive species, workshops on lawn care within the watershed and other information relating to Rainy Lake.

COUNTY

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“They’re really into the product they produce,” Briggs said. “They really truly like their peat, and they like to produce it.”

In other business, during the regular board meeting Tuesday, the board moved forward with a plan to acquire land which would ensure public access to a Bigfork River boat access.

The board authorized Land Commissioner Dennis Hummiltzsch to seek grants and other government partnerships to purchase approximately 34 acres from Molpus Land Management, which would secure public access to the Reedy Flats Bigfork River boat access.


Hummiltzsch said the property was coming up for sale, and in order to secure public access for the future, the county would have to purchase the land. A past offer on the land was \$70,000, he said, though an appraisal could come in at \$100,000.

In order to pay for the property, Hummiltzsch will seek grants and other partnership opportunities. He will also look into a purchase agreement with Molpus, in order to secure the land while the county secures funding and develops an offer.

The road and parking lot at the site is an added value, Hummiltzsch said, because the cost of adding a road and parking lot to a new site would be more than the county would pay to retain the current site.

An informational meeting regarding a Special Education Advisory Council will be held at Falls High School on Wednesday, Sept. 17 at 5:30 pm in Room 130. This meeting is for any parent/guardian of a child with special needs. The purpose of the meeting is to explain what an Advisory Council is and to see if there is an interest in having an Advisory Council in the Falls area. The meeting will be facilitated by Dr. Reggie Engebritson, Executive Director of the Northland Special Education Cooperative, which serves the International Falls school district.

If you have questions, please contact
Dr. Engebritson at 218-741-9201 ext. 0
or at HYPERLINK
mail to: rengebritson@northlandsped.org
rengebritson@northlandsped.org



Pequana Playhouse Invites You to Join Us for a THEATER ARTS WORKSHOP

Saturday, Sept 20 hourly sessions 9:00am -2:00pm at Lake of the Woods School

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This activity is made possible, in part, by a grant provided by the Region 2 Arts Council through an appropriation from the Minnesota State Legislature with money from the State's general fund.


PUBLIC NOTICE


Low Interest Loan Program Available for Homeowners with Flood Damage

The Headwaters Regional Development Commission (HRDC) will be hosting an Open House on Thursday, September 18, 2014 from 10 am – 1 pm in the basement conference room at the Koochiching County Courthouse. The purpose of this Open House will be to inform affected homeowners of Disaster Relief loans provided by Minnesota Housing through the Quick Start program and the Community Fix Up program for uninsured damage to your home due to the flood. The program provides loans up to \$70,000 if your home or rental property was damaged in the flood. Funds are for capital improvements that return the home to the pre-disaster or comparable condition. The program does not cover damage to water structures or land.

Staff from the HRDC will be available to answer any questions as well as to assist in completing preliminary paperwork. All applications for disaster relief must be received by the HRDC no later than October 24, 2014 so it is important to begin the process as soon as possible. If you are unable to attend the Open House but would like additional information, please contact Jackie Meixner at 218-333-6530.


FIND DEALS
in
The Journal Classifieds





The Littlefork Medical Center Board Of Directors And Staff Would Like To Extend A Sincere Congratulations To Paul Havens, MD

On His Retirement, September 12, 2014.



We wish Claudia and Dr. Havens a wonderful retirement. The Littlefork Medical Center would like to thank Dr. Havens for his dedication and years of service to the healthcare field. You will be greatly missed by everyone at the Littlefork Medical Center!