

LOCALNEWS

Restoring Bronco pride

FHS gears up for new courses, program

BY EMILY GEDDE  
Staff Writer

In just under two weeks, the hustle and bustle of life at International Falls public schools will return as students and staff kick off a new school year.

At the high school level, the district's new superintendent, Kevin Grover, said he looks forward to changes intended to regain some of the culture at the school.

"We're trying to make an environment that gives students more freedom," he said.

For the first time, high school juniors and seniors will have the option to take concurrent enrollment, or college in the schools, courses at FHS. The classes, which are similar to those found in a college setting, will be taught by high school teachers in high school classrooms. At the same time, they will be treated like college courses.

"Students can expect a college-level environment at the high school," Grover said. "It's comparable to college life with a high school atmosphere."

Just as students would find on a college course schedule, some concurrent enrollment classes will only run three or four days per week. When a student doesn't have class, Grover said they are free to leave



STAFF PHOTO BY EMILY GEDDE

From left, Falls School Board members Gordy Dault, Mike Holden, Michelle Hebner and Darrell Wagner sit at a table in the new junior and senior lounge at Falls High School. The group toured the new lounge that school officials hope will give students a place to go during open class periods.

the building or take a break in a new junior and senior lounge.

The lounge, near the cafeteria, allows the upperclassmen to relax, watch TV, visit with friends, or access the Internet. The room won't be staffed, but will be under surveillance, Grover noted.

"It's meant to be a drop-in lounge," he said. "I think it's great."

Aside from restoring Bronco pride, the concurrent enrollment effort is also linked to school officials retaining students at the high school.

According to a report from FHS Principal Tim Everson to the Falls School Board in February, 41 percent of last year's seniors and 18 percent of juniors were enrolled full time in classes at Rainy River Community College through the Post Secondary Enrollment Option, or PESO, program. The number of FHS students attending RRCC took a big chunk out of the

FHS class size, Everson reported.

"By offering a competitive environment, we will gain some of our students and leaders back," Grover said. "It'll change the culture and environment here. Is there money attached to students? Of course, but the bigger thing is...we want to get some of our school spirit back."

In addition, Grover said this year will hopefully be a stepping stone to offering more concurrent enrollment classes in the future to allow students to graduate with their high school diploma as well as an college associate's degree.

"If that's what they want, we want to offer that," he said.

New program

Another change coming to FHS is the implementation of the Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports, or PBIS, program intended to address behavior issues in a positive way. The program highlights

a proactive approach to positive behaviors. It's a nationwide effort that aims to aid students in both the academic and behavioral sphere. It educates students on how to be respectful, responsible and safe from the time they arrive at school to the time they are dismissed — and everything in between.

Grover said staff has been traveling to out-of-town workshops to prepare for the program that was introduced at Falls Elementary and West End Elementary schools last year. He said it took the high school a little longer to prepare because of the reward system.

"We had to work out different ways to offer rewards for students who demonstrate positive behaviors," Grover said. "Businesses have been helping us out immensely."

The superintendent added he is excited about the program and the surprises in store for students as the year progresses.

Get your eat on: Labor Day picnic set for Sept. 1

BY EMILY GEDDE  
Staff Writer

Every year on the first Monday in September, American families and friends gather to celebrate the nation's labor movement and the social and economic achievements of workers in the United States. It stands as a tribute to the contributions and sacrifices workers make for the well-being of the nation.

Locally, the day will again be recognized with a picnic that invites anyone and everyone in the community to attend for an afternoon of free food, entertainment and relaxation.

Hosted by the city of International Falls and the Koochiching Labor Assembly, the fourth annual Labor Day picnic is set for 4-7 p.m. Sept. 1 at Smokey Bear Park. In addition to the meal, activities for children are set to begin at 2 p.m. and entertainment starts at 3 p.m.

"The picnic is for everyone who wants to attend," said RaNae Whitbeck, secretary/treasurer of the Koochiching Labor Assembly. "We are inviting everyone, including our friends in Fort Frances and all those in our surround communities."

Last year, organizers said around 2,000 people attended the event and Whitbeck said a similar number is expected this year.

"It is difficult to predict an exact number, but there will be plenty of food," she said.

Years ago, the picnic was a "big event" that included a parade, Whitbeck said. Organizers have made it their goal to host a memorable end-of-summer event.

If you go

What: Fourth annual Labor Day picnic  
When: 4-7 p.m. Sept. 1  
Where: Smokey Bear Park (in the event of rain, the picnic will be at the Bob Walls Memorial Union Hall)  
Cost: Free, but organizers ask those who attend to bring a canned good donation.

"This year, we will have more activities for children and will continue with our music, which was a success last year," she said.

With the Nov. 4 general election on the minds of many, it is likely local and state politicians may make an appearance at the event. However, Whitbeck said it was decided when the first picnic was brought back four years ago, the event would not pose as a campaign ground.

"This is a time to get together with family and friends and to remember the importance of the labor movement," she said. "It is an event people can come together to relax and have some fun."

While there is no cost to the picnic, Whitbeck said organizers are requesting people who attend bring a canned goods donation for the Falls Hunger Coalition.

"We want people to come and have a wonderful time and to celebrate the workers that make our country the great nation it is," Whitbeck said. "The picnic is a great time to connect with family and friends."

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