

GRADUATION

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Grover said the school also needs to do some more research into the unknown category of students, which are students that neither graduated, dropped out, or chose to continue working towards graduating.

“We’re losing them and not knowing what’s happening to them,” Grover said. “They’re kids that drop off the radar, and that’s not acceptable.”

When it comes to keeping students engaged and connected, a lot of that success comes from providing programs that meet students’ needs, Grover said. It involves meeting the needs of a wide variety of students, and continuing to work with them.

“We need to have good programming in place to meet all the needs of all students,” Grover said. “It’s a great goal, I don’t know if it’s ever attainable. But we need to keep working at it regardless.”

Littlefork-Big Falls

Littlefork-Big Falls School reported a graduation rate of 91 percent for 2014, or 10 points above the state average. Superintendent Chris Bachmeier said he was “pleased” with the school’s rate, but said it still falls short of the ultimate goal.

“We want to be at 100 percent, but we’re not quite there,” Bachmeier said. “We’re making strides, and we’re excited about that.”

Bachmeier mentioned the importance of meeting students’ needs as an avenue toward achieving a 100-percent graduation rate. The local emphasis placed on education is important, too, he said.

“We try to instill in students the importance of education, and the community does a good job of that,” Bachmeier said. “The kids seem fired up for school and we make positive strides that way.”

It’s the people, rather than the technology, books or programs that have helped

L-BF’s graduation rate stay above the state average the past five years, Bachmeier said.

“Honestly, I think it’s the teachers, families and kids in the school system,” Bachmeier said. “They’re taking it seriously and focusing on education for the kids.”

At L-BF, there were 32 students in the graduating class in 2014, with 29 graduating and only one dropping out. Bachmeier said the small class sizes mean three kids can cause a big impact on a percentage.

“It does skew it drastically,” Bachmeier said. “Fortunately we haven’t had it hurt us.”

Dating back to 2010, the average graduation rate at L-BF is 87.7 percent.

South Koochiching-Rainy River

Small class sizes are the norm in Independent School District 363, which includes Indus and Northome Secondary schools. In Indus, the graduation rate was 57 percent, and there were no re-

sults available for Northome, due to not meeting the class size minimum of 10.

Superintendent Jerry Struss said while their four-year graduation rate is lower than state average, their five- and six-year graduation rates fall closer in line to the state average.

At Indus, the five-year graduation rate was 55 percent, and the six-year graduation rate was 77 percent. At Northome, the five-year graduation rate was 85 percent, and the six-year graduation rate was 91 percent.

Statewide, the five-year graduation rate was 83 percent, and the six-year graduation rate was 83 percent as well.

Struss said there are a few things outside the schools’ control when it comes to the graduation rate, notably students entering the district already behind schedule to graduate in four years, and families moving out of the district.

“If they’re coming in behind, it’s pretty impossible

for them to make up a year in two or three years,” Struss said. “It’s also hard to do something if families are moving out of the area. Having a dialogue is helpful, but there’s no magic solution.”

Dating back to 2010, the average graduation rate at Indus is 61.6 percent. Meanwhile, the average graduation rate at Northome from 2010-2014 is 86 percent.

State highlights

Whichever way you sliced the student populations, many groups showed increases in graduation rate in 2014, including:

- Asian/Pacific Islander students posted an 81.7 percent graduation rate, up three points from 2013, and a nine point increase since 2011.
- Black students posted a 60.36 percent graduation rate, up nearly three points from 2013, and a more than 10 point increase since 2011.
- Students learning English posted a 63.7 percent graduation rate, up four points from 2013, and an 11

point increase since 2011.

- Students receiving free- or reduced-price lunch posted a 65.9 percent graduation rate, up two points from 2013, and a seven point increase since 2011.
- Hispanic students posted a 63.2 percent graduation rate, up four points from 2013, and a 12 point increase since 2011.

The new graduation rates also show the gap between white students and students of color is closing throughout the state:

- Since 2011, the gap between white and black students narrowed by 8 percentage points while the Hispanic-white gap reduced by 9.6 points.
- Since 2011, the graduation rate gap between English learners and native English speaking students in the state has narrowed by more than 10 percentage points.
- The gap between students in poverty and their more affluent peers has reduced by nearly 7 percentage points since 2011.

REUNION

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whatever you want,” Peterson said. “You don’t have to be an alumni to enjoy the activities. We just have to cross our fingers the weather will cooperate.”

The reunion has been timed to give people a chance to stay in Borderland for family gatherings over the Fourth of July, or to return to their homes for celebrations there, Peterson said. In past years, the reunion was held over the Fourth of July holiday, which he said forced some alumni to make a difficult choice.

The L-BF All School Reunion Committee continues to meet on the third Tuesday of every month. That schedule began in April and Peterson said the group will likely meet weekly in June to finalize details.

Peterson said Doug Henrickson will emcee the reunion and will be meeting March 17 with the committee to plan an event program.

The committee is also considering who to select as parade grand marshal and L-BF instructor Aron Bohnert is working to gather an alumni band to perform at the general assembly and an afternoon music fest, Peterson said.

organized by one person serving as general chair of the committee.

“We’re doing something a little different this time,” Peterson said. “We broke up and delegated people to chairs of committees. When we organized we thought it would be a lot easier on the lead person if we have six or seven chair people and it seems to really be working.”

Peterson is the only member of the committee to serve on all the all-school reunion committees since it organized in 1975 to plan for the first reunion in 1976. “Where did those years go?” he joked.

The chairs of the committees for this year are: Rob Polkinghorne, addresses; LuAnn Henrickson, advertising; Sara Wendt, games and activities; Clarice Thompson, general assembly; Brian Lindvall, parade; Nadine Breeton, registration, memorabilia and vendors.

Other committee members are Beth DeLack, Beth Gable, Judy Gielarowski, Tara Gustafson, Sis Hill, Kristi Kennedy, Mickey Novotny, Deb Polkinghorne, John Polkinghorne, Kayla Reller, Kathy Siltman, Karen Stelton and Melissa Sullivan.

Peterson said people may mail questions about the reunion or get involved by

contacting the respective committee chair at L-BF Reunion Committee, P.O. Box 293, Littlefork, MN 56653.

The next steps in the planning involve finalizing a mailer planned to be sent at the end of March. Peterson estimated about 2,500 mailings will be sent out about the reunion.

But finding addresses of alumni to send the information has been challenging for he and Rob Polkinghorne, who have spent three months searching for addresses of former students, he said.

“You can’t image how many addresses from five years ago (the last reunion) are wrong and how difficult it is trying to track people down,” he said.

Despite their best efforts that involved contacting relatives and posting fliers around the community, Peterson said about 100 L-BF alumni can’t be found.

“At some point in time, you just have to give up on that,” Peterson said.

However, people may still register if they don’t receive the mailing. He suggested people contact committee chairs and or send a note to the committee at the above address if someone thinks their address has not been found by the committee.

PRESCHOOL

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The all-day programs are a result of action by the Falls School Board last February to add the section at elementary school and also waved tuition fees for preschoolers. The decision, officials said, stems from the attempt to close achievement gaps and get children enrolled in the school system sooner.

“Closing that gap is so important,” Falls Elementary Principal Melissa Tate said. “When we were requiring fees, a lot of families couldn’t afford to send their child to preschool. Now we are getting some kids who might be considered at-risk and are able to get them on track sooner.”

Walls said in her 3-year-old class, which runs two days per week, she is certain there are children who wouldn’t have been able to take advantage of the program had there been a cost to do so.

“It’s been so great to catch those kids,” she said. “There is research that shows drop out rates are lower if kids start a structured learning program early...To me, it’s very ex-

citing to have this opportunity.”

Cost is worth it

On top of Walls’ all-day sections, the district also offers half-day classes for 3- and 4-year-old students taught by Mandi Baron and Kristie LaVigne, respectively. All together, about 115 preschool students are serviced. Public schools receive funding for the number of students enrolled, however, that doesn’t apply to those in a preschool program.

According to Superintendent Kevin Grover, some money is secured through school readiness dollars for preschool, but for the most part, the program, which next year could cost \$204,000, is unfunded.

“Do I think it’s worth it? Yes, 100 percent,” Grover said. “But that money has to come from somewhere.”

And the program is quickly outgrowing itself. Preschool registration Monday resulted in more than 20 names on a waiting list for the 4-year-old, all-day program, leaving several parents wondering if their child will end up with a spot.

“That right there is enough need for a whole

other class and more,” Grover said of the wait list. “I know there are a good number of people who didn’t get in...I want to consider options and we’re going to have to look quickly and get some ideas out there...If there are things we can change to serve more people, I support it, but we’ll have to see how far we can go.”

He added there is the possibility of legislation kicking out some money for 4-year-old programs, but that can’t be counted on just yet, he said.

“I think we need to serve anyone who is interested, but on the other hand, we’ll have to look at that keeping in mind it’s at the expense of other offerings,” Grover said. “And, of course, the (school) board would have the final say.”

Regardless, the interest is exciting for the district, Tate said.

“The program is making a name for itself,” she said. “I believe our preschool program is top of the line...It’s an investment not only in our school district, but our community as well. The board deserves kudos... This is pure cost, yes, but I believe it’s worth it.”

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Salmon with Brown Sugar & Mustard Glaze

1 Tbsp. brown sugar

1 tsp. honey

2 tsp. olive oil

2 Tbsp. Dijon or brown mustard

1 Tbsp. light soy sauce

1 Tbsp. olive oil

2 tsp. grated fresh ginger or 1 tsp. powdered ginger


1 whole salmon fillet, skin on, thawed

6 servings


4 oz fillet, serving size

In a small saucepan over medium heat, melt brown sugar with honey and oil. Remove from heat and whisk in mustard, light soy sauce, additional olive oil and ginger. Allow to cool. Place salmon (skin side down) on large sheet of aluminum foil, folding foil edges up to hold glaze over salmon.


Brush on glaze. Place on heated grill or oven at about 400° and grill or bake until done: about 20 minutes. Carefully remove from foil with spatula; skin adheres to foil. Garnish with parsley sprigs and serve with your favorite grilled/roasted vegetables.



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