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Klamath Falls City Schools

District Newsletter
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Why Not Just Hold Them All Back?
By Paul Hillyer, KFCS Superintendent

For as long as this writer can remember, a debate has gone on in education. It has gone something like this: "We have a number of students who have not mastered what was taught this year. What should we do?" One group lines up on the side of holding the students back and making them repeat the grade. The other side presses for just moving them on and hoping they do better the next year. Which group is right?

Of course, the answer to this question is open to discussion. However, the repercussions of having students repeat grades are not. This topic has been extensively studied and the verdict is clearly in: grade repetition is overwhelmingly negative for a huge percentage of repeaters. While it does give them an extra year to catch up on what they did not learn, that benefit dissipates with time. In other words, within another couple of years these same students are behind again so the learning advantage disappears. However, the loss of self-esteem and self-confidence that is usually brought on by "flunking" often lasts forever.

Is there another way to solve the dilemma of making sure students leave their current grade ready for the next one? This is a critical question that aims at the heart of an effective educational system. Schools (and parents) need to make sure that students are ready for the next grade before they leave the past one. If they do not, the credibility of the system needs to be questioned. After all, this is the purpose of universal education in the United States.

This key question has become a major concern of KFCS. The district sees solving this problem as critical to helping all students be ready for higher graduation standards and for the challenges of their adult lives. Solving the problem of all students being ready for the next grade is a root educational issue and a key focus of the work of educators across the district. Here are some keys to overcoming this problem:

1. **Making sure parents are actively involved in their children's education**, so they can support what is happening in the classroom with their actions at home.
2. **Enforcing high standards of attendance for students** as strong attendance is critical to learning. A student cannot learn if he or she is not in school.
3. **Creating the classroom conditions necessary for high levels of learning** which includes strong teaching practices, timely interventions for students who are not making adequate progress, having enough learning time in the core areas of language arts and math, increasing the time spent on reading and writing in all subjects, and ensuring consistency in delivery of the core curriculum.
4. **Providing time outside of the regular school day and year** to give students more opportunities to learn material that they did not fully grasp the first time.
5. **Clearly communicating student progress to parents** so they understand their students' status relative to their grade level and ultimately to their future graduation.

The importance of teachers, parents and students working together as learning partners to ensure progress toward the next grade and ultimately toward graduation cannot be overstated. This is the most important work of schools. It is also one of the most important responsibilities of parents. Student growth and success is only possible when everybody does their part. Also critical in the success of this essential learning project is high expectations for all. District staff, parents, and students all must hold themselves accountable for the work and effort that is necessary to create the conditions necessary for 100% student graduation.

We have a distance to go in reaching this goal. However, the repercussions of not making it are devastating to consider for each young person who fails in his or her journey toward a high school diploma. This is why making sure each student is ready for the next grade before the end of each school year is such an urgent matter.

Other News:

1. The first elementary goal-setting conferences were conducted in November. Parents, teachers, and students worked together to set academic and behavior goals for each learner. The parent survey conducted to determine parent satisfaction was reassuring as 87% felt the new conference format was either excellent or satisfactory. Eighty-three percent also said Reading, Writing and Math instruction was excellent or satisfactory. Receiving the highest rating was school supports for families with 93% of parents rating their schools in these areas as excellent or satisfactory.
2. Through a state grant, teachers and administrators are reworking the teacher evaluation system. Teacher ratings will be at least 20% determined by student achievement in their classrooms. If you wish more information on this please see our district website. Notes and progress reports for this work will be updated regularly.
<https://sites.google.com/a/kfcityschools.org/class-project/home>
3. The Governor's budget was announced on Friday, November 30, 2012. It includes \$6.15 billion for education. Should this pass the legislature, it would cover the PERS increase required of school districts.
4. The teacher negotiation process has started. The sessions are open to the public and will be in the district boardroom at 1336 Avalon St. Updates will also be available on our website. The next session is Wednesday, December 5, at 5:00 p.m.
5. The community Graduation Rate Improvement Committee has been meeting monthly for the last three months. It is exciting to hear the excellent ideas that are generated through this community group. They are poised to put together their strategic plan of action to gain wider community involvement on this issue.

Please forward this newsletter to anyone you think might be interested in KFCS news. If you are not a regular recipient of this free newsletter and would like to be, please respond to this email and let us know.