

**April 5, 2013**  
**Klamath Falls City Schools**

**KFCS' District Newsletter**  
**Making Graduation Happen One Step at a Time**  
By Paul Hillyer, Superintendent

The Klamath Falls City School District's Board of Directors will be considering a new mission statement at their April board meeting: "100% Graduation is Our Expectation." To make this mission a reality, the school board will also be considering a new vision statement: "Each Child Ready for the Next Grade." The former statement is very much dependent on the latter. Here is why.

Dropping out of high school typically starts at a very young age. Studies show that schools can accurately predict who will not graduate from high school in the early elementary grades. Warning signs include failing grades in math or reading. They also include poor attendance and discipline problems. Research shows that students that are doing poorly in two of these areas in elementary school are at great risk of never earning a high school diploma.

This is why the proposed vision statement is so critical to accomplishing the proposed district mission. Graduation is like a 13-step staircase. A student must successfully make it to the next step each year to be on track for high school completion. If they do not successfully advance from one step to another anywhere along the way, the odds of graduating are seriously decreased. Thus, each student's learning growth in each grade from kindergarten through senior year is critical.

Due to this fact, teachers across the district are communicating differently with parents and students this year. They are not merely sharing grade reports with them. Instead, they are talking to them about whether or not they are ready for the next grade as judged by their acquisition of grade-level knowledge and successful testing on grade-level content. If either of these areas is below expectation, parents and students will need to work diligently with the teacher and the school to make up for lost ground.

How is this done? One way is through more focus on learning at home. This includes a daily check-in with students on their progress during the day and on the work they have brought home that tells the tale on their learning success. Secondly, parents can make sure that children do their homework accurately and neatly in order to demonstrate their understanding and their pride in their work. Thirdly, making sure students read for about 15-30 minutes per day is an important step. One becomes a better reader the more he or she reads. Finally, parents can insist that students take advantage of remediation opportunities if they are necessary. This includes after-school tutoring and summer school to overcome learning deficits.

Schooling, like all of life, is a journey that takes place one step at a time. Learning steps happen each day and grade-by-grade. The best way to ensure that each child graduates from high school is to make sure he or she leaves the current grade ready for the next one. When this

happens, high school graduation is a given and the likelihood of adult success is high. This is what we want for each child.

### **Other News:**

1. You may have read that I am not in favor of the new open enrollment system in the state. We are now completing our second season of this requirement. It started last year after a legislator could not get her child into a neighboring school district. She decided at that point to solve the problem for her family by pushing forward an open enrollment law across the state to force the neighboring district to accept her child. Her initiative was soundly rebuffed in committee with only one person speaking in favor of the law. However, she got the last laugh when a huge educational compromise package on the last day of the legislative session included this new mandate. Therefore, every district within the state has had to deal with the issue since May of 2011. So why am I not in favor of this requirement?
  - First, it is unnecessary and creates more work for school districts. The former transfer policy that was in place between the City and County school districts was working very well. The year before open enrollment, 2010-11, the cooperative agreement between the two school districts approved 164 of 172 transfer requests. No valid reason for a transfer was denied. This included transfer requests because of daycare or work site proximity. It also included allowing students to attend another school that offered classes not offered in their home high schools.
  - Student mobility between schools and districts is one of the key causes of student failure and high school dropout. Open enrollment increases this mobility and can result in a revolving-door syndrome that results in families having their children go back and forth between schools – often for non-educational reasons.
  - School districts have no control over who enters their schools through open enrollment. Students who caused great trouble in their prior schools have to be accepted despite a highly disruptive history in their past schools.
  - There need not be any educational reason to shift a student due to this law. This opens the door to more seamy elements such as high school coaches poaching students from neighboring districts to improve their won/loss records.
  - Open enrollment sets up unhealthy competition between districts. Schools are not businesses. They work best through cooperating with each other and sharing ideas and instructional practices that are improving student learning. The open enrollment system shifts this emphasis to one where districts hold fast to best practices to have an advantage over their neighbors.
  - Open enrollment is a zero-sum game. This means for every student a district gains, another district loses the state revenue for that student. The open enrollment system has the potential of reducing students from learners to dollar signs.
  - The open enrollment law is largely a benefit to wealthier families who can afford to transport their children many miles for school. Poor families cannot typically provide such support.
  - The law also gives advantage to wealthier districts. Some districts in the state due to their affluence have better school facilities and higher operating revenue. Under open

enrollment, these districts have an unfair advantage over their poorer neighboring schools.

2. One more open enrollment note: At the outset last year, it was reported that KFCS lost 100 more students than they gained through open enrollment. On the first day of school in 2012, this deficit disappeared and the district actually gained one more student than they lost. This was partly due to a number of people who indicated they planned to open enroll to another school district changing their minds and staying in the district.
3. This Sunday, April 7, is the Annual High School Honors' Recital at 2:00 p.m. at Ross Ragland. Tickets are \$15 for adults and \$10 for students 12 and younger. Nine of the 14 students are from KU! Please show your support for our students and our fine music program by attending.

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.