

Dist. 20 officials work for and achieve high graduation rates

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
Thursday, 03 November 2011 14:14 -

LOCAL, STATE RATES		
YEAR	DISTRICT	STATE
2009-10	96.55%	90.01%
2008-09	95.00%	89.52%
2007-08	92.96%	89.76%
2006-07	94.74%	89.17%

(Source: Nebraska Department of Education www.education.ne.gov)

GHS bucks state, national percentages.

About 75% of the nation's students graduate from high school.

Statewide, the rate is much better as Nebraska's percentage hovers around 89%.

Closer to home, nearly 97% of the senior class at Gothenburg High School received a diploma in 2010.

Ask Gothenburg High School principal Randy Evans about the secret to the district's success and he'll tell you they work at it.

"I think we're blessed here with interventions and strategies before a student even decides to drop out," Evans said.

When a student decides to leave school, he said he thinks the school failed in some way.

"We try not to judge but it hurts," Evans said.

Reasons why students leave school, he said, include social issues such as a teen becoming pregnant, getting behind in school work and giving up, or deciding to work full time.

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“I take it personally and question whether we did everything possible to prevent it,” Evans said.

Strategies the district employes, Evans said, include:

Encouraging students to use access time, before classes start in the morning, when teachers are accessible.

Finding in- and out-of-school tutors if students are struggling academically.

Making in-home visits if problems are social ones.

Keeping parents abreast of student performance through progress reports and parent-teacher conferences.

He said he also tries to personally connect with each senior.

To Evans, a high school diploma means opportunity to explore different careers, he said.

“Doors won’t be shut,” he said. “A student doesn’t have a chance without a diploma for certain jobs.”

Following high school, he said not every student should attend a four-year college.

“We want our students to be successful, productive citizens and have a meaningful role in their community,” Evans said. “And, that when they graduate, they’ve had a positive experience at our school.”

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Generally speaking, a third of GHS graduates go to a four-year college, a third to two-year institutions and a third enter the work force.

“A diploma gets them to where they want to go,” Evans said.

Although general equivalency diplomas are an option, the principal said public schools in general are positive places with many opportunities to connect with other students.

Evans likens graduation to harvest.

“Students are our crop and harvest is when they walk across the stage to receive their diploma,” he said.

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Editor’s note: Next week, read what changed the mind of one Gothenburg High School senior about dropping out of school.