Richfield High School sees graduation rate increase in every student group

The numbers are in and the four-year graduation rates at Richfield High School (RHS) are climbing. The 2018 four-year graduation rate at RHS not only increased three percentage points compared to 2017 (from 80.9 percent in 2017 to 84.3 percent in 2018) but also surpassed the state graduation rate of 83 percent. The positive progress of RHS is even more apparent when looking at the improvement in graduation rates over the last five years. RHS has increased by 16 percentage points from 2012 to 2018 compared to the state’s increase of five percentage points during the same time span. “I’m really proud of the stamina and grit of our educators to continue this work over time in order to see this long-term sustained improvement,” said Superintendent Dr. Steven Unowsky.

Additionally, all RHS student groups (Asian, Latino, Black, White, English Learners, Special Education, Free/Reduced Price Lunch, Females) increased graduation rates when compared to last year and now have a higher graduation rate than their statewide peers with the exception of our Male population (behind the state by three percentage points). “All of our students are thriving and growing,” said Unowsky. The achievement gap between students of color and white students is significantly closing over time with RHS at a 33 percent gap in 2012 and an 11 percentage point gap in 2018. “We are consistently narrowing the gap and not leaving any group of our students behind in our success,” said Unowsky.

The group that saw the highest increase in graduation rates was Special Education which rose 15 percentage points from 2017 to 2018 (50 percent to 65 percent). Unowsky contributes the impressive growth to a “honed focus” on Special Education programs and supports.

Unowsky attributes the success of RHS to several factors including encouraged parent involvement and access, delayed start times, expanded instructional days, strengthened teacher-student relationships, and exceptional leadership and teachers. This work has not only been reflected in graduation data, but in test scores as well. Unowsky notes it’s “exciting that our student ACT scores, a national college entrance exam that all 11th grade students take are jumping at consistent increments.”

“We have created a climate and culture of expectation and success,” said Unowsky. “From the moment they (students) walk into our school system, to the moment they graduate, they know we are working together to build onto their future,” said Unowsky.
MESSAGE FROM THE **SUPERINTENDENT**

Dear Richfield Community,

Spring in Richfield brings us a time to celebrate our ongoing work. Our schools continue to improve and grow to make sure that there are amazing opportunities for every student, family and community member. We would like to take some time to highlight some of the great things happening in Richfield Public Schools.

**Personalizing Education:** It is hard to believe that we are midway through our ten year technology levy. While we began with the infrastructure to support personalizing student learning through technology, we are now working to put more technology into the hands of our teachers and students. At our middle and high schools, Chromebooks allow our teachers to more effectively target their teaching to meet the individual needs of every student. One of our strategic plan goals is to make sure that we are accelerating learning for every student. It is exciting to see technology being used effectively to help all types of learners grow.

**Student Relationships:** We have also spent time this year personalizing attention and deepening relationships with students and families. Throughout our school district, we have trained staff in Innocent Classroom, a relationship-based program designed to support our staff in learning more about each student. We work to build upon our strong and effective relationships with every child to help students learn. When our teachers and staff learn more about each student it helps us value the special gifts brought by every child in our classrooms.

We have some exciting and positive things occurring to support all students and to ensure that they learn, grow and excel. Please enjoy this Your Schools newsletter as we share some of the news from Richfield Public Schools. Thank you for your ongoing support and partnership as together we work to make Richfield a better place.

Thank you,

Dr. Steven Unowsky, Superintendent
Richfield Public Schools

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MESSAGE FROM THE **SCHOOL BOARD**

Dear Richfield Community,

With the 2018-2019 school year nearing a close, I wanted to say thank you on behalf of the school board for your ongoing support of and commitment to Richfield Public Schools. Our school board is comprised of six elected members who hold the responsibility of overseeing the district’s strategic direction and leadership, fiscal health, and above all, student learning and experiences in our schools. This school year we were also joined by student board members and Richfield High School seniors Diego Luis Niquio and Naseer Folson, whose perspective and presence were invaluable. We look forward to welcoming new student board members in the fall of 2019.

We also welcome your thoughts, questions, and presence! You can find contact information for each of us at www.richfieldschools.org/Board, along with our board meeting schedule, information about how you can address the board during public comment at upcoming meetings, and video recordings of past board meetings.

There is a lot to be excited about in Richfield Public Schools, from the capital facilities projects underway across the district, to the ongoing work in all of our buildings centered on excellence and equity for students, and Your Schools is a great way to stay updated on what’s happening. Enjoy this newsletter and stay in touch!

Crystal Brakke
Richfield Public Schools Board Chair
RPS CLASS SIZES AMONG LOWEST IN METRO AREA

Metro ECSU (Metropolitan Educational Cooperative Service Unit) recently announced the completion of its annual class size study, which includes data from 28 participating school districts from the 7-county metro area. Richfield Public Schools was found to have among the lowest average class sizes for grades K-12!

We thank you for your support of our fall 2017 operational referendum, which had a significant focus on improving our class sizes.

40 RHS SOPHOMORES INDUCTED INTO NATIONAL HONOR SOCIETY

This spring, 40 Richfield High School (RHS) sophomores were selected for induction into the National Honor Society, an organization established to recognize outstanding high school students. This is the largest incoming group of inductees in recent memory. “Not only are we seeing more students but the diversity is getting richer as well,” said Dr. Nicole Schiffler, RHS English teacher and the advisor for National Honor Society.

Inductees must have a grade point average of at least 3.0 and are selected based on a set of four criteria: scholarship, service, leadership and character. As members of the National Honor Society, students will be expected to complete at least 50 hours of volunteer service in their communities during both their junior and senior years at RHS. In addition to completing volunteer hour requirements each year, students must also take a leadership role in a special project of their choosing. Past student leadership projects have included teacher appreciation events, bully awareness campaigns, seatbelt safety events, autism awareness projects, and providing childcare during parent-teacher conferences.

Through their leadership and volunteer hours, members make a difference not only at RHS but in the Richfield community at large. “I like it (advising National Honor Society) because whenever I worry about the future of our country I look at what these students do for our community and it gives me restoration,” said Schiffler.
With more than 60 different activities, clubs, and athletics, students at Richfield High School (RHS) have no shortage of opportunities to get involved and make a difference in the world. Natalie Hanson, RHS sophomore, is involved in tennis, track, nordic ski, environment club, National Honor Society and involved in her church, but she felt she could do more to help the community and the world. “I was looking for something to get further involved with the school and I heard good stuff about Me to We club so I decided to join,” Natalie explained.

The Me to We club is a national organization that focuses on global citizenship and volunteerism in the local community. The RHS club started nearly 15 years ago and is open to 9-12 graders. This year there are about 20 kids who are active members, including Natalie.

To provide members with a chance to truly make a difference, each year a handful of students across the country are given a scholarship from the national organization to attend a two-week volunteer trip at different locations across the world. “I enjoy traveling so when I saw this opportunity to go across the world and make an impact somewhere else, I had to go for it,” said Natalie.

Natalie applied for one of these scholarships and was selected to travel to Kenya this July. While staying with a local tribe, she will make meaningful connections as she volunteers on a sustainable development project, beads with mamas, meets community elders and hears stories that have been passed on through generations.

Natalie is looking forward to this incredible trip and is most excited about the chance to work on a sustainable development project because she’s “really into helping the environment.”

“It’s amazing to know that (through this RHS club) I’m making a difference in the world,” said Natalie.

Second graders at Richfield Science Technology and Math Elementary (RSTEM) had a reason to be more excited about reading earlier this spring. RSTEM second graders had a special visit from the Minnesota Timberwolves Book Mobile. Every second grader was able to “shop” the book mobile and pick out a new book to take home. The Timberwolves mascot Crunch was on hand to autograph the student’s new books. “A huge thanks to all the RSTEM and Timberwolves staff for making the event a memorable day for all the second graders,” said Principal Amy Winter.

Second graders pose for a picture with Crunch and their new books.

Crunch autographs new books outside the book mobile.
GIRLS ON THE RUN INSPIRES JOY, HEALTH AND CONFIDENCE

It’s May and students are shedding their winter coats and spending more time outside. As the temperatures rise, Girls on the Run groups are lacing up their tennis shoes and taking advantage of the warm weather by running near their schools. Perhaps you’ve seen a running group in your neighborhood.

Girls on the Run is a national afterschool program that inspires girls in grades 3-8 to be joyful, healthy, and confident. Throughout the course of a ten-week program, girls learn critical life skills including managing emotions, resolving conflict, helping others and making intentional decisions.

Seventy-five girls from Sheridan Hills Elementary, Richfield Dual Language School (RDLS) and Richfield Middle School meet in teams twice a week that are led by 17 teachers who are trained as Girls on the Run coaches. These coaches teach the girls life skills through fun, engaging lessons that explore who the girls are, how to build healthy relationships, how to work as part of a team, and how to connect with and shape the world at large.

“As coaches, we love being involved because we wish something like Girls on the Run existed when we were younger. The program inspires girls to recognize their inner strength and celebrate what makes them one of a kind! It is important to us to help younger generations know they have a voice and learn how they can use them to make a difference in their lives and in the lives of others,” said Shannon Ritt, Richfield Middle School teacher and coach.

This is the second year that Girls on the Run groups have been in place in Richfield Public Schools. Assistant Superintendent Leadriane Roby is passionate about the mission of the organization and serves on the board for the Twin Cities council. “I’m a strong believer in bringing positive programs like this (Girls on the Run) to our schools,” said Roby.

“It’s important for girls of this age to know they are accepted for who they are, no matter what body they come in. It’s even more important to send this message because it’s a counter-message to what these girls hear in the media or in other areas of their lives,” added Roby.

If you see a Girls on the Run group running along the sidewalk in your neighborhood, be sure to cheer them on! The girls (and the coaches) would love your support and encouragement. At the end of the 10-week training program, all Richfield teams will run a celebratory 5K at the Mall of America on Saturday, June 1 alongside 6,000 other girls from schools across the Twin Cities.
**RMS STUDENTS PRESENT RICHFIELD MAYOR WITH PORTRAIT**

Four Richfield Middle School (RMS) eighth graders worked together to create a special surprise portrait for Richfield Mayor Maria Regan Gonzalez. The portrait painting was completed for a class project led by RMS art teacher Steven Mills. Students were asked to work together to paint a portrait of an inspiring individual while using the mathematical properties of ratios. Through assigning this project, Mills aimed to fuse student learnings in art, math, and social studies.

“Whenever there is a relevant thing happening in their community, local or beyond, I try to get them tapped into it,” said Mills. He explained that in past years students have chosen athletes and public figures like the Dalai Lama. This year he urged the class to think local. The group which included four students, each representing a different race, chose the first person that came to mind when they thought of a strong woman leader, Richfield’s first Latina mayor, Maria Regan Gonzalez.

Mayor Regan Gonzalez was deeply honored and moved that she came to mind for these students, she said, “It’s moments like these that I capture and hold. And remind myself why representation matters and my role to constantly create the space for more leaders to grow and reflect us.”

“I think it was neat that the student artists came from different races to unite to create this portrait that marks an important time in Richfield’s history,” said Mills.

In addition to teaching at Sheridan Hills Elementary, being an assistant principal at Richfield Intermediate School, and leading Centennial, she also coached girls varsity basketball for six years with incredible results, four-time conference champs and runner-up in the 2012 state championship game.

We wish Lee Ann well on her new adventures in retirement and welcome Colleen Mahoney, who brings 30 years of education experience, as the new principal of Centennial Elementary this fall.

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**CENTENNIAL ELEMENTARY PRINCIPAL LEEANN WISE TO RETIRE**

After 30 years of teaching, and 18 years of leading Centennial Elementary as Principal, Lee Ann Wise will retire at the end of this school year. “It has been an honor and privilege to work alongside some of the most dedicated, and hardworking teachers, para professionals, custodians, food service, bus drivers and District professionals,” said Wise.

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**WE’RE HIRING! COME WORK WITH US!**

Looking for a flexible work schedule with no weekend hours? Do you enjoy working with students? Do you want to make a difference in our community? Richfield Public Schools is hiring for the 2019-2020 school year.

Competitive pay. No prior experience required.

**Apply today at richfieldschools.org/jobs.**

Questions? Contact Marta Weirich at 612.798.6034 or marta.weirich@rpsmn.org.

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**WE’RE HIRING:**

**REGULAR POSITIONS:**
Nutrition Services, Bus Drivers

**SUBSTITUTE POSITIONS:**
Teachers (License required), ParaProfessionals, Building Cleaners
Bus Drivers, Nutrition Services
ARTS GRANT HELPS “FAMILIES CREATE TOGETHER”

By Carole McNaughton-Commers, Director of Community Education

Richfield families will have several upcoming opportunities to experience cultural arts and even learn how to make pottery thanks to a “Families Create Together” grant from the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council. These grant funds are provided to stimulate and encourage the creation, performance, and appreciation of the arts throughout the metro area.

Richfield Public Schools Community Education will use the funds to create low or no-cost family workshops led by professional instructors from the Northern Clay Center and ArtStart arts organizations, as well as local artists within our community and school district.

ArtStart will bring its expertise, supplies and props to Richfield this Summer and Fall for families to experience cultural arts, traditions, and books. The Clay-To-Go program will also provide hand-building pottery classes to create mugs, bowls, plates, animal sculptures, or objects using basic hand-built pottery techniques and painting with glaze.

Look for information online at richfield.ce.eleyo.com. Or you can add your name to the interest list to receive class information directly, just email your contact information to communityeducation@rpsmn.org or call 612-243-3000 to be added.

Local artists and art instructors who are interested in teaching and leading in this project are encouraged to apply now at communityeducation@rpsmn.org or call 612-243-3000.

The Families Creating Together grant debuted with an arts activity table at the Richfield Community Wellness Expo on April 13.

RICHFIELD HEALTH RESOURCE CENTER SUMMER HOURS

Did you know that all children who live in Richfield can receive free medical care and low cost health services at the Richfield Health Resource Center (RHRC)? RHRC is located inside Richfield High School and provides basic medical care including check-ups, illness and injury treatment, immunizations, sports physicals, dental care, health insurance navigation, and chemical health support. All youth who live or go to school in Richfield from birth through high school graduation are eligible for services.

RHRC will continue to provide free medical care and other low cost health services this summer when schools are closed. RHRC will be open and available for walk-ins Wednesdays in June from 1-5 p.m. and Mondays and Wednesdays in August from 1-5 p.m. To access the RHRC this summer, use Door 9 on the east side of the high school. Visitors can park in the parking lot off of 70th street, near the athletic field and railroad tracks. Call 612-798-6049 for more information.

The RHRC is a community resource developed through a partnership of the Richfield School District, Park Nicollet Health Services, Children’s Dental Services, Portico Healthnet and the Park Nicollet Foundation. The Center was built with a grant from the Park Nicollet Foundation which also provides ongoing support of free services. Care at RHRC is confidential and free, regardless of health insurance coverage.

SPRING 2019
FACILITIES IMPROVEMENT PROJECT WELL UNDERWAY

If you’ve driven by Richfield High School or Richfield Dual Language School (RDLS) lately you’ve noticed that facilities improvement work has begun and the heavy machinery has rolled in!

Thanks to your support of the bond referendum in the fall of 2017, buildings and classrooms will be improved to better serve our students. Improvements will be focused on improving safety, security, traffic flow, classrooms, common areas and opportunities for students to learn together. Work has already begun at the high school and RDLS, with Richfield STEM School soon to follow. Heavy construction on these buildings will continue over the summer.

The Richfield Public Schools District Office has temporarily moved from the high school to make way for construction and is currently located at the Central Education Center, 7145 Harriet Ave.

The entire construction and improvements program will take four years to complete and all district buildings will be renovated. Stay tuned to our website, Facebook or Twitter channels to follow along with construction progress.

Footings being formed and poured for the new entrance at RDLS.