

Grad rates reveal mixed results

By Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-Observer

POLK COUNTY — Graduation rates in Polk County schools, and statewide, are up for the most part for 2013-14, but a change in how the state calculates the rates is partially responsible for the uptick.

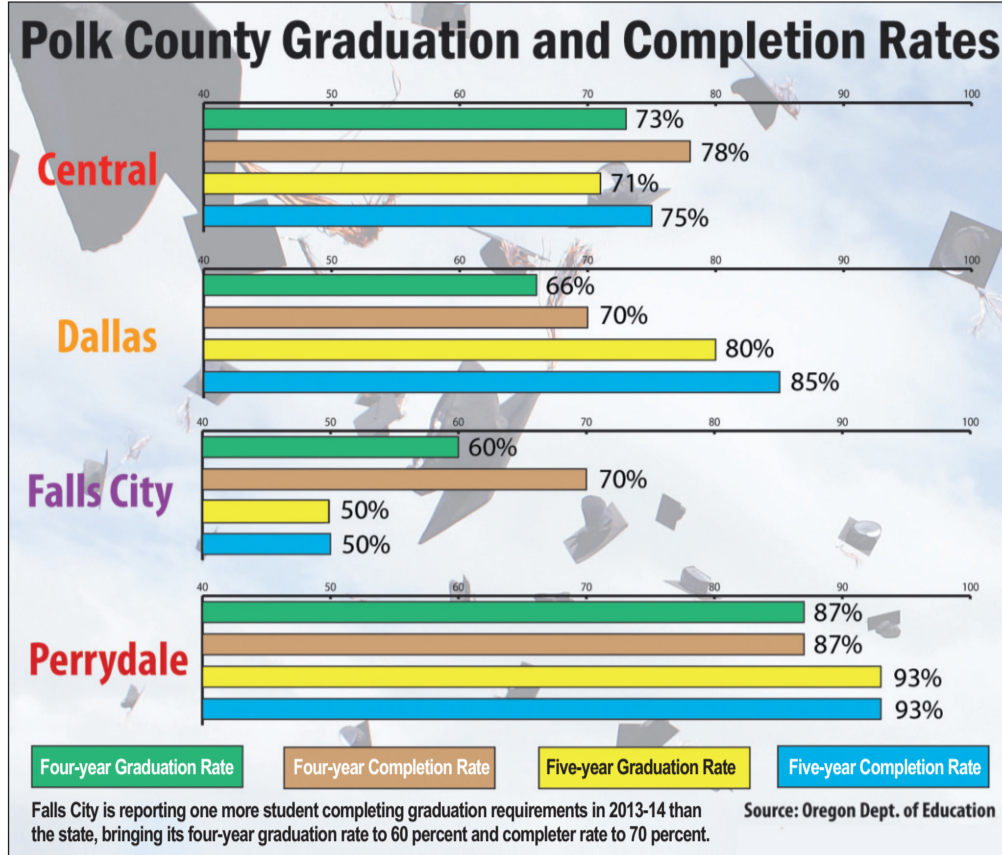
Dallas' graduation rate is up to 66 percent, from 52 percent last year, but that rate, six points lower than the state average, is technically down from 2012-13. Graduation rates are based on students who enrolled in high school in 2010-11.

This year, the Oregon Department of Education, which released the rates Thursday, included students who have fulfilled graduation requirements but deferred receiving diplomas to earn college credit in fifth-year programs, such as Dallas' Extended Campus. Also included in the report are students who earned modified diplomas.

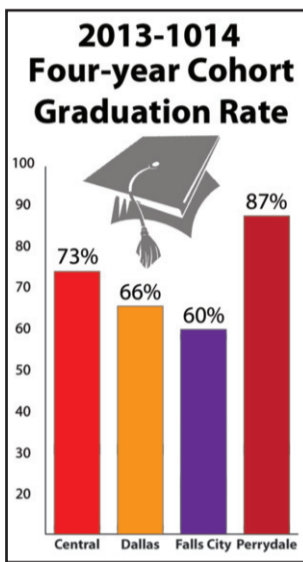
In the past, Dallas calculated its own rate to include Extended Campus enrollees in addition to the state's because all participants in the program must qualify for graduation. In 2012-13, that rate was nearly 76 percent, meaning a decline of 10 percent this year.

Interim Superintendent Dennis Engle said the district had an unusually high amount of "noncompleters" — those who did not earn a diploma or GED on time. Dallas had 78 noncompleters, according to the report, 38 of which are enrolled this year.

Dallas High School Principal Steve Spencer said the school has adjusted its math classes to help students who are at risk of being short of credits for graduation. He said the school has had success helping seniors demonstrate "essential skills," also required for graduation, and is making adjustments to



Above shows the percentages of student in Polk County school districts who received a diploma or GED in four years and those who completed requirements in five years.



Central, Dallas and Falls City's grad rates increased. Perrydale's fell slightly.



Members of DHS's Class of 2014 await their diplomas. Changes in the way the state calculates rates improved Dallas' percentage, but technically the graduation rate is down.

help those who may be credit-deficient.

"We've said that we haven't had a senior not graduate because of essential skills, which is true, but

some haven't met graduation requirements because of credits," Spencer said.

Dallas' five-year graduation rate, for students who enrolled in 2009-10, at 80 percent, is higher than the

state average.

Falls City School District's graduation rate made a huge jump to 60 percent in 2013-14 from 20 percent the year before. Superintendent Jack Thompson said the

state's report, which had the district at 50, was one student off.

He said graduation rates at FCHS are taken with a grain of salt, considering classes are so small. One or two students falling short can cause big swings, he said. That being said, Thompson is pleased with the improvement.

"We have a lot of kids having to fulfill essential skills and we had staff spending extra time," he said. "Kudos goes to the staff for putting in the extra effort — and it shows."

Falls City's five-year graduation rate is 50 percent.

Central School District also saw a significant increase, with its rate at 73 percent, up 7 percent from the year before.

Central Superintendent Buzz Brazeau credits the improvement to investments the district has been able to make as budget cuts eased, such as adding more classified staff and teacher training. "A portion of it comes from focusing hard on professional development, helping teachers become better at their craft," he said.

While Brazeau is proud of the growth, he said the district can't forget about the 27 percent of students who didn't make it to graduation. "We have to keep focused," he said.

Central's five-year graduation rate is 71 percent.

Perrydale's graduation rate slipped to 87 percent, from 90 in 2012-13, but is still well above the state average. Perrydale Superintendent Eric Milburn said he isn't concerned.

"We are right where we need to be as far as graduation rates and getting students college and career ready," he said.

Perrydale's five-year rate is 93 percent.

Statewide, the four-year rate is 72 percent, up from 68.7 in 2012-13. The state five-year rate is 76 percent.

See the Show

What: "Oklahoma!" by Richard Rogers and Oscar Hammerstein, Central High School drama production.

When: Thursday through Saturday, 6:30 p.m.; Feb. 11-13, 6:30 p.m.; Feb. 14, a box social dinner will begin at 4:30 p.m. on Valentine's Day, with the play to follow at 6:30 p.m.

Where: Central High School, 1530 Monmouth St., Independence.

Admission: \$8 general admission; \$5 students; \$20 per person for the box social dinner, which includes dinner, dessert and the show.

Of note: Concessions will be western themed, and include fresh baked cookies.

For more information: 503-838-0480; www.chsperformingarts.org.

Oklahoma: Play opens Thursday at Central

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At the social, the women are auctioned off via a picnic basket. Boyack said it is important that Curly wins her character's basket and has to work hard to outbid Jud, who is jealous.

When Boyack and Sykes finally end up together, one might think they had an off-stage romance, but Boyack said it isn't so.

"It's acting," she said casually. "Even though we don't have a real romance, we find that thing in real life and use it."

In an intense scene between she and Eschette's character, Boyack said it was amazing to finally connect to her character's sense of anger and sadness.

"I just broke through," she said.

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