



JOLENE GUZMAN/Itemizer-Observer

Falls City students pick out new shoes for school, as well as school supplies at Thursday's "Tools for School."

Hiring spree at CSD means 14 new teachers

Central schools fills teachers, staff to pre-recession levels

By Emily Mentzer
The Itemizer-Observer

INDEPENDENCE — Central School District has been on a sort of hiring spree before the school year starts Sept. 8.

Teachers in the district have increased from 164 last year to 178 this year, said Liisa Zeimantz, human resources coordinator. More full-time counselors have been added, as well as more instructional assistants and administrative assistants.

One of the driving factors in the increase is the implementation of full-day kindergarten. Four new kindergarten teachers were hired; six new instructional assistants will be hired to help in those classrooms.

It's a dramatic improvement to five years ago, when the district had just three new hires, McFarland said.

"Our numbers are the largest they've been," said Rich McFarland, assistant superintendent. "We've more than recouped lost positions that the recession took away from us, primarily with licensed and classified. We have more teachers than we've ever had."

It hasn't been easy, he noted. The district has had to actively recruit candidates to fill positions.

"A few years ago, all we had to do was open the door and they came to us," McFarland said. "This year has been more of a search on our part to try and locate qualified staff. We're contacting universities to try and secure folks."

Zeimantz said all districts are competing for a small pool of candidates, particularly in bilingual and special education.

"Those are very challenging positions to fill," she said. "Every district is heavily recruiting them."

Teachers are not always in such demand. When the recession hit, Central schools had a huge number of applicants, but no positions open, Zeimantz said.

"Those folks floated away, because of course they needed to find employment," she said. "Now we're in the reverse where we — and all the districts — could use that kind of pool. But it's a cycle."

That cycle of economy versus applicant pool is reactionary, McFarland said.

Because teachers were in less demand, universities pulled their teacher prep programs, he said.

"The number of programs developing teachers is less than it was five years ago, and the demand for teachers is greater," he said. "The number of people going into the programs has dropped, primarily because of the rumor of it's not a great field to go into; there's not the opportunity that folks want, so they steer folks to other directions."

Now, McFarland said, the message is: by the time you finish your program, the jobs will be there.

But Zeimantz said that is hard to anticipate.

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GEARING UP

Students, parents in Falls City get all they need for start of school

By Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-Observer

FALLS CITY — Lincoln King's face lit up when he looked in the mirror Thursday night.

An incoming Falls City second-grader just had his hair cut and was liking his new look, grinning at his reflection.

Lincoln, and more than 180 fellow school children, took part in "Tools for School" Thursday at Falls City's Upper Park. Tools for School is a back-to-school event sponsored by the Salvation Army Salem Kroc Corps.

With the help of Falls City Christian Church volunteers and professionals, such as the stylists offering haircuts, the event provided more than just backpacks filled with grade-required school supplies.



JOLENE GUZMAN/Itemizer-Observer

Lincoln King, 7, gets his hair cut on Thursday evening.

Parents and students could visit stations offering free clothing, dental screenings by Capitol Dental, immunizations, access to local resource agencies and have dinner donated by Dairy Queen.

While their parents made stops at various information tables, the kids had plenty to do with a bouncy house, face painting and other games to play.

Falls City resident Iesha Derby brought her daughter,

Araydia, 5, to the event to help get her ready for her first year of school. She said financially, the event was "a saving grace" for her family.

"It helps with everything. It's phenomenal," Derby said as she watched Araydia get her hair cut. "I'm impressed with the amount of volunteers who take time out of their careers to do this."

This was the third year the Salvation Army has hosted "Tools for School" in Falls City, and the event has grown significantly in that time.

"We've had about 250 people come through," said Melissa Baurer, the Salvation Army director of social services, about 45 minutes before the giveaway ended. "That's pretty good attendance. The first year we had four resource tables. That's grown to 12 providers this year."

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