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## WEEKEND POSTBULLETIN

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# Grad rates lag for special ed

Muñoz says some students aren't on traditional track

BY JOHN MOLSEED  
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Each of Rochester's high schools has been identified by the North Star testing system as needing comprehensive support from the state

Department of Education for special education students.



Muñoz

The graduation rate for special education students at Century, Mayo, John Marshall high schools and at the Alternative Learning Center is below 67 percent, according to North Star's report released Thursday.

North Star was created by the

Minnesota Department of Education to measure school performance in academic achievement and progress, English language acquisition, graduation rates and attendance. The system was developed to meet the standards set by the federal Every Student Succeeds Act.

School Superintendent Michael Muñoz said he isn't surprised that the rate earmarked the high schools for needing attention. He said that's in part because the district has pro-

grams to help some special-needs students that put them off a traditional graduation track. He pointed to the Rochester Academy for Independent Living program, which helps students gain life skills outside the classroom.

"Yes, our four-year graduation rate is going to be low," Muñoz said. "We're here to provide students with the skills and knowledge to do whatever they want."

The special education graduation

rate was the only metric that designated Century, Mayo and John Marshall high schools as needing assistance. The Alternative Learning Center was tabbed as needing assistance for having a graduation rate of less than 67 percent for all students — including ethnic minority students, students who qualify for free and reduced lunch, white students and English learner students.

See **GRAD RATES**, page A2

## Hit the lights



Byron junior Ben Stienessen, center, pumps up his teammates in a huddle before the start of their first game Friday against Dover-Eyota.

It takes three weeks to make a team

BY ANDREW LINK  
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High school football players have three weeks to prepare for their first games.

From the first whistle to start practice to the last pep talk before the game, coaches and players work to become a team.

Like most area teams, the Byron Bears started work at 7 a.m., Aug. 13, with team guidelines, play installations and expectations.

Each week played a role in preparing for the season.

"We try to get our entire offense, defense and special teams installed in the first week," head coach Ben Halder said. "So there is a lot of learning and there will be a ton of mistakes made. But without mistakes you can't learn."

The second week was devoted to refinement. There was a scrimmage with other teams and evaluations.

"The first two weeks are to find out who can play what positions and who your people might be that play a bunch," Halder said.

After that, it's all preparation for the first night under the lights.

The Bears finished 6-4 last season and haven't set any season goals. They'll take it one game at a time.

"We talk about 1-0 each week. The game we play that week is the only one that matters," Halder said. "If we focus on being 1-0, that stuff will all get to a point where it takes care of itself."

**A7:** 3 weeks. 52 players. 1 goal.

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 WEEKEND



# Tax bill hinders Bear Creek housing effort

Church faces unexpected hit of \$118,000

BY JOHN MOLSEED  
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A Rochester affordable housing project got an unexpected tax bill of more than \$118,000 after taking title of the property in June.

On June 29, Bear Creek Christian Church officially took title to the 37-acre site, which had been home to Crossroads College. The college, which had occupied the site for more than 45 years, operated there as a tax exempt operation.

Crossroads ceased operation as a religious college in 2017 and could not file under exempt status for taxes payable in 2018. That

means the site — valued at approximately \$4.9 million with a taxable value of \$3.1 million — would be assessed full taxes.

That left Bear Creek Church on the hook for \$118,415 in property taxes when it took title to the property. "That's kind of a big

hit," said Jeff Urban, Bear Creek Church's outreach pastor.

Urban said he hopes a raise in rents won't be needed to offset the tax bill, saying that doing so would go against the goal of the project.

"If we had to charge market rates for everybody, we wouldn't do this project," he said.



Urban



Volunteer K.C. Reed on Wednesday installs baseboards in an apartment at Bear Creek Church Housing in Rochester.

Bear Creek's plan for the site includes housing and commercial space for nonprofit organizations at below-market rents. The taxes put a sizable dent in

the church's business plan, Urban said.

The site is home to 13 four-bedroom family apartments, 18 one-bedroom apartments and a dozen

four-bedroom spaces that have shared kitchen and living room spaces. The commercial space has yet to be developed, but if new tenants are found soon, that could help offset the tax bill, he added.

The entire site needed work when Bear Creek took it over.

"It's got a lot of deferred maintenance," Urban said.

Stopping plumbing leaks, replacing toilets and fixing windows helped drastically cut utility expenses, said K.C. Reed, who volunteers his time doing maintenance and upkeep on the properties. Balancing maintenance with the need for revenue and the demand for affordable housing keeps volunteers like Reed busy.

See **TAX BILL**, page A2