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Grand Forks Herald

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SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2021

ND tourism primed for big return | But is there enough money available for marketing?

By Sam Easter
 Grand Forks Herald

In the long, endless summer of COVID — marked by lockdowns, early closings and all kinds of travel restrictions — there just wasn't very much to do.

So, in and around Grand Forks, people went outside.

"We went into the season like everybody: pretty much



Coleman

with everything shut down, we became everybody's outlet."

on a lockdown," said Larry Hagen, manager at Turtle River State Park, west of Grand Forks. "But the one thing that became very apparent to us,

As the year wore on, and restrictions began to loosen, Turtle River's hiking and biking trails became one of the hottest spots in the region. Annual visitation typically hovers just above 80,000, Hagen said, but in 2020, there were more than 120,000 guests, with constant comments that visitors had never seen the trails so well-used.

"We heard reports it was hard to buy a bike," Hagen said. "Well, they were all here."

That pent-up, displaced demand for something to do has been near-universal. At Yellowstone National Park, September visitation was up 21% over 2019, per the National Park Service, for the busiest September since

record-keeping began. Americans might be nervous to head to the bar or take the family to the movies, but they're still looking for something to do.

For leaders in North Dakota's tourism industry, that pent-up desire looks like opportunity — an economic race car, revving its engine, just waiting for the green flag

TOURISM: Page A5

Trump's lawyers say evidence lacks in trial

By David Morgan and Richard Cowan
 WASHINGTON (Reuters) — Donald Trump's lawyers on Friday said Democrats had provided no evidence the former president incited last month's deadly U.S. Capitol riot and had used his second impeachment trial to settle political scores.

Trump is on trial in the U.S. Senate on a charge of inciting the Jan. 6 insurrection by his supporters who stormed the seat of Congress in Washington to stop lawmakers from certifying Democratic President Joe Biden's election victory, resulting in the deaths of five people including a police officer.

Trump's lawyers argued that his remarks, including a fiery speech that day urging supporters to "fight like hell" to stop the election certification, were protected by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which ensures the right to free speech.

"This trial is about far more than President Trump. It is about silencing and banning the speech the majority does not agree with," said Bruce Castor, one of Trump's lawyers. "I urge you instead to look to the principles of free expression and free speech."

In arguments this week, Democratic members of the House of Representatives said Trump had set the stage for the violence by falsely claiming the election results were fraudulent and egging on his supporters with fiery rhetoric.

The Democrats are unlikely to gain a conviction though as few Republican senators have come out against Trump. The trial

TRIAL: Page A7

FAILING GRADES ON RISE IN GF SCHOOLS

As schools work through the pandemic, administrators worry about learning gaps

By Pamela Knudson and Hannah Shirley
 Grand Forks Herald

Evan Whalen's grades haven't slipped during the pandemic, but he said it takes more work to keep them up.

Whalen, a junior at Grand Forks Central High School and a student representative on the Grand Forks School Board, has been in the hybrid learning model since the beginning of the school year, attending class in person and online on alternating days.

Paired with the stress of the pandemic, he's not surprised students are falling behind.

"I think for those whose grades are suffering, it's because they're not in regular, daily contact with teachers," he said at a recent Grand Forks School Board meeting. He thinks "grades would improve" if students were learning full-time in school.

Full-time in-person learning throughout



Eric Hylden / Grand Forks Herald

Catherine Gillach, assistant superintendent of secondary education for Grand Forks Public Schools, is leading the effort to support students whose grades have suffered due to the lack of in-person contact with teachers during the pandemic. Gillach and other educators are concerned about pandemic-related learning gaps.

North Dakota was shut down in March in an effort to slow the spread of COVID-19. The Grand Forks School Board voted

last summer to implement its hybrid learning model in grades 9-12 to keep school buildings at 50% capacity, but

students also had the option of full-time distance learning. In the first semester of this school year, 367 students, or 16% of

the 2,273 students in grades 9-12, opted for full-time distance learning and 1,906

GRADES: Page A8

County 12.7% of way toward herd immunity

By Joe Bowen
 Grand Forks Herald

As Grand Forks Public Health's COVID-19 vaccination effort nears the end of its second month, health department staff have fully vaccinated about 12.7% of the people they believe are needed to achieve "herd" immunity among Grand Forks County residents.

The North Dakota Department of Health reports that more than

HERD: Page A6



Eric Hylden / Grand Forks Herald

Samantha Ketterling, pharmacy manager at Thrifty White, draws a dose of the Pfizer vaccine on Tuesday, Dec. 29, at Valley Senior Living in Grand Forks.

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GRADES

From Page A1

chose to attend in-person school every other day in a hybrid model, said Catherine Gillach, assistant superintendent of secondary education for Grand Forks Public Schools. This semester, that figure has dropped to 300, or about 14%.

A December report by the Herald noted that even with the return to the hybrid model, some educators in the district were concerned that some students were at risk of falling behind.

Now, it appears those concerns may be coming to fruition.

According to Grand Forks Public Schools data obtained by the Herald, the number of "A" grades students received has remained steady, decreasing from 43% of the total letter grades given to students in fall 2019 to 42% in fall 2020. However, the number of "B" and "C" grades dropped slightly. The number of "D" grades generally stayed steady, but the number of "F" grades given in the district increased.

For instance, in grades 6-12:

- In fall 2020, the percentage of "B" grades was 21%; in 2019, it was 26%.
- In fall 2020, the percentage of "C" grades was 15%; in 2019, it was 17%.
- In fall 2020, the percentage of "D" grades was 9%; in 2019, it was 8%.
- In fall 2020, the percentage of "F" grades was 12%; in 2019, it was 5%.

The increase in the number of failing grades during the pandemic was more stark in the higher grade levels.

In fall 2020, 12.9% of freshmen grades were "Fs," compared to 7.7% in fall 2019. Among sophomores, 13.1% of grades were "Fs," up from 7.8% in fall 2019. In the junior class, 11.2% of grades were "Fs," up from 4% last fall.

And in the senior class, 5.1% of grades given were an "F," up from 1.8% from last fall.

Roughly 26% of the failing grades in grades 9-12 were given to students who had opted into the full-time distance learning model. Nearly 40% of "Fs" given in the freshmen class last semester were given to students doing full-time distance learning. For sophomores, that number was 28%, for juniors 25% and for seniors 13%.

At a recent Grand Forks School Board meeting, Superintendent Terry Brenner reiterated to board members what the numbers show: students are struggling, and learning gaps are increasing.

"We anticipated and we have seen that there are more students struggling this year than a typical year," Gillach said. "We're not necessarily surprised by that. We know that students connected to teachers every day gives them the most enriched and supportive learning environment on a daily basis."

Return to full-time in-person learning

As COVID-19 numbers have dropped in recent weeks, the Grand Forks School Board decided this week to bring high school students back to full-time in-person learning, with some safety precautions, starting March 8. Brenner told the board he's confident that can be accomplished safely, and all but two of the

School Board members voted to move the plan forward.

Chris Douthit, who voted in favor of returning high school students to full-time in-person learning, is worried that some damage has already been done. Douthit, a longtime teacher and school administrator, has repeatedly expressed concern about the number of students who are losing ground academically, as well as emotionally and socially, during the pandemic.

He also is concerned about the consequences. "If a student fails two courses in their freshman year, it really sets them on a horrible track," he said. "Success becomes more and more limited."

There are a lot of resources available to students and many teachers, counselors and others who "are doing the heavy lifting," he emphasized, but his concerns are based on conversations with or emails from parents whose high schoolers are "absolutely struggling" in the hybrid learning model.

"There are students who want to just give up," he said. "They're exhausted. On the off days, they're probably sleeping. ... How many students maybe have said, 'That's it, I just can't do this?'"

North Dakota high school students need 24 credits to graduate - or six hours in each of four years, he said. If a student earns four credits instead of six in freshman year, "well, now you've got to earn 20 more over the next three years - so you're going to have one year of six (credits) and two years of seven (credits). And, I'll tell you, no senior wants to be taking seven hours in a school day."

Students in grades 9-12 who have failed certain classes have been given the option of delaying the start of second semester and continuing to work to earn those credits. Or, they may choose to start the second semester and resume work to earn those credits later this year.

Students also have the option of pursuing "various summer school paths to recover credits," Gillach said.

Teachers and counselors have worked on individualized learning plans and have been flexible with students this year. This week, 75 failing grades were changed to passing, allowing those students to receive credit.

Path forward

Gillach and other educators expected the academic losses they're seeing this school year, based on experience gained from the swift shift to distance learning last March. That was "the big impetus" for opening the Mentor Center, a place for Grand Forks Public Schools students to receive tutoring help, counseling and socialization, last month on the UND campus, she said.

"Hopefully, kids who struggled in semester one will take advantage of services at the Mentor Center and not compound the learning gaps," Gillach said.

"We've been planning for that, and how to help counteract that sort of lapse, since summer," she said. "We know we're going to have to offer extended school year opportunities - i.e., summer school - at greater levels than before ... and we're talking about a mashup, if you will, enhancing our credit recovery programs using both some of

our online technology, combined with additional face-to-face courses."

Alicia Dela Cruz, a junior at Red River High and also a student representative on the Grand Forks School Board, said that mostly, students just want to get back into their classrooms. From what she's heard from her classmates, they're struggling to retain information on their "off" days. She said many students have found that under the hybrid model, it often takes more work to stay engaged in their classwork.

And, Dela Cruz said, they miss their bonds with their teachers.

"They're seeing a lot of emotion, stress going on," she said. "The upperclassmen want to enjoy their 'lasts,' and the underclassmen their 'firsts.'"

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1120 17TH AVE SE, EGF - 1:00-2:30 - HOSTED BY J. VORACHEK
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1315 UNIVERSITY AVE, GF \$140,000 Tamara 701-740-3559	2934 COLUMBINE CT, GF \$259,000 Laurie 701-739-1014	426 5TH AVE SE, EGF \$164,900 Kym 701-330-6416	1202 17TH AVE SE, EGF \$309,900 Laurie 701-739-1014	1402 57TH AVE S, GF \$499,900 Laurie 701-739-1014
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We encourage everyone who plans to attend an Open House to follow guidelines established by the Center for Disease Control (CDC). Practice social distancing, remove your shoes or wear protective coverings, wash your hands or use an alcohol-based sanitizer. We recommend that you bring a mask and/or gloves as they will not be provided. 10 people will be allowed in a home at a time. We thank you for your help in preventing the spread of Covid-19 during this time.

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