

Fewer students will mean fewer state aid dollars

By David Lias

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It appears that total enrollment in the Vermillion School District for 2012-13 will be slightly lower than the previous school year.

It is an issue that will challenge members of the Vermillion School Board as they make decisions regarding spending and budget planning.

"The big change to point out is that we lost 24 students from one year to the next," Superintendent Mark Froke told the board at its meeting earlier this month. "We went from 1,235 students to 1,211. Obviously, if this will hold true to the end of September, which is our count date, that has some financial implications for us coming up which you are certainly used to working with."

A positive aspect of the enrollment total is class sizes.

"There is one section size of 16 (students) and the reason for that is that a couple moved out that we weren't prepared to see move, and we thought rather than disrupt the other sections, we'd leave that at 16," Froke said, speaking of enrollment among second grade sections at Austin Elementary. "As we have new students move in during the year, that's where they will be placed - in that lower enrollment section."

There are four sections of

kindergarten at Austin, with class sizes ranging from 21 to 23 students.

"It's a little higher than what this district has been used to, but I can tell you in districts across the state you will find numbers much higher than that," the superintendent said. "The addition of the junior kindergarten establishes a certain dynamic in the setting that we didn't have before. I'm sure it will be helpful for the students as well as the teachers."

This year's enrollment numbers show a loss of 11 students from second to third grade over the summer, and a drop of nine students from ninth to 10th grade. The district gained 14 students from fifth grade to sixth grade. Much of that increase can be attributed to students ending their elementary education at St. Agnes Catholic School, and beginning sixth grade in the public school district.

Enrollment at Austin and Jolley Elementary schools is 195 and 342 respectively. There are 303 students attending the middle school; the enrollment total at the high school is 371. Total district enrollment is 1,211.

"Jolley lost 16 from last year, and the high school 15," Froke said, who added that school principals Mark Upward and Curt Cameron have noted that

the student loss in those two schools is due to parents moving out of the school district primarily because of occupational reasons.

"There were some split home situations where students moved out of the district to go live with mom or dad, but primarily it was because of occupational changes," Froke said. "Mr. Upward indicated to me that at least half of the parents of children who moved out of the district moved out of state."

School districts across South Dakota, including Vermillion's, receive a state aid allocation of \$4,490.91 per student. A drop in enrollment of 24 students would mean \$108,000 fewer dollars in state aid revenue being received by the Vermillion School District.

School administrators won't know the consequences of enrollment on the district's finances until the end of the month. State law allows districts to base their per student state aid allocations on either the enrollment figures at the end of September 2012, or the average enrollment during the 2010 and 2011 school years.

That average enrollment of the two previous school years may be the higher figure, and could therefore help soften the financial blow that will accompany the enrollment drop.

JACOBSON

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Population also is a factor, being that the more people there are in the world, the more carbon their activities will generate.

"The higher amount of carbon in the atmosphere, the higher it stays for centuries," Jacobson said. "The residence time for carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is centuries."

This will only serve to keep temperatures higher, he said. However, Jacobson said solutions can be achieved.

"When we think about sustainability and our ability to have a world that is safe for our children and grandchildren, we really have to come to grips with these issues," he said.

"There are going to be challenges, but we have a lot of smart people here and in

other parts of the world who are trying to figure out how to do it.

"We can figure out a way to do a better job than we are now to deal with these issues," he said.

Jacobson cited the Clean Air Act as a positive example of how human behavior can affect the climate.

In the mid-1980s, there was much concern about acid rain and the number of factories producing sulphates that could lead to it, but between 1985 and 2010 the phenomena was almost entirely eliminated in this county, he said.

"It's pretty impressive," Jacobson said. "People said we couldn't do it ... but now we wouldn't even consider going back."

Climate change needs to be

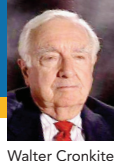
approached in a similar way, he said.

"We can make decisions based on science that are effective and achieve some results," he said. "Now, changing the chemistry of the whole Earth's atmosphere from all over the world ... is a real challenge."

"But humanity has this challenges, and I'm confident they will do what needs to be done," he said.

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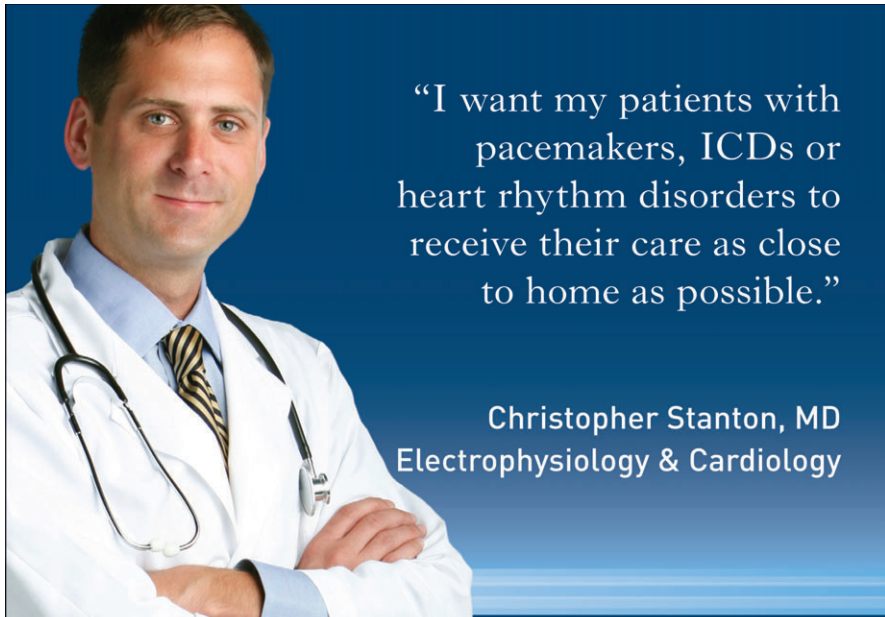
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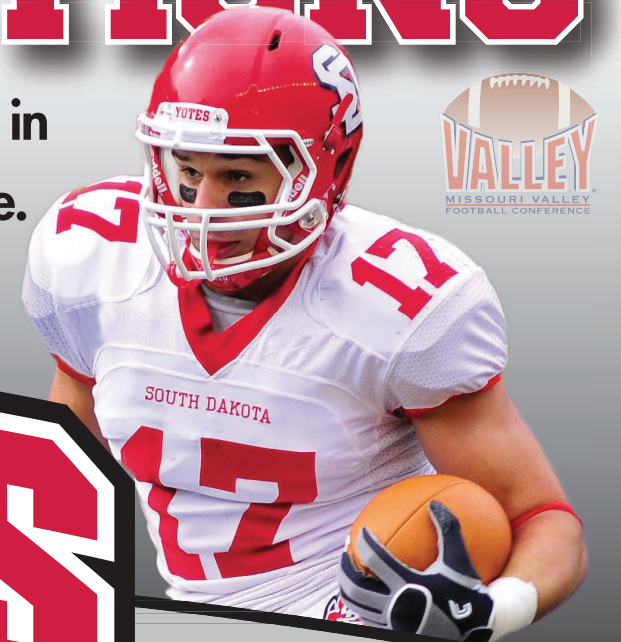


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