

## VHS sees sharp rise in graduation rate

By Randy Dockendorf  
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Last spring, Vermillion High School saw 97 percent of its high-school age students earn a diploma – a 12 percent jump from just five years ago.

The school district made a very deliberate effort to raise the graduation rate, Superintendent Mark Froke told the school board Monday night.

“Five years ago, it was 85 percent,” he said. “We focused on that at the high school, and we have moved that number quite a long way.”

VHS Principal Curt Cameron also noted the focused approach to raising the graduation rate.

“Our guidance counselors are getting our kids on the right track,” he said.

Vermillion’s graduation rate stands far above the state level, Cameron said.

“The state average is 89.99 percent, and we are at 97.44 percent,” he said. “We blew the state away.”

The Vermillion district tracks its graduates in two ways, Cameron said.

“We have 97.4 percent of our graduating seniors are labeled as completers,” he said. “They either graduated the traditional way or finished their GED (General Equivalency Diploma).”

In that respect, the fell district fell just short of one goal, he said.

“Our traditional completers are 94.3 percent, and our goal is 95 percent,” he said. “But we have raised our graduation rate, and we are getting to our goal of 95 percent.”

The district seeks to help students achieve their high school diploma however possible, Cameron said.

“What has really helped has been the alternative school and the GED,” he said. “We would like them to go through the traditional high school setting. But for some, that’s not possible.”

# VHS ranks 7th in state for ACT scores

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The Vermillion school district ranks seventh in South Dakota for its scores on a college entrance exam.

For 2014, Vermillion High School students scored an average of 23.6 out of a perfect 36 on the American College Testing (ACT) exam. The number compares to the statewide average of 21.9.

The composite – or overall – Vermillion average score rose from 22.6 in 2010 to 23.4 in 2011. The average score then dipped to 22.9 in 2012 before rising to 23.2 in 2013 and 23.6 last year.

At Monday’s meeting, Vermillion school board chair Chris Esping noted the strong overall score. During the last five years, Vermillion’s average has risen a full point while the state average has remained at the same level.

“Our district goal (for an ACT average) has been 24, and we’re so close,” she said.

VHS principal Curt Cameron credited the test scores on a strong effort throughout the school district.

“We’re very proud of our students and teachers, not only at the high school but for grades K-12,” he said. “This reflects on the younger elementary students. You get a solid foundation, and it carries on.”

Last year, 81 percent of the VHS seniors took the ACT exam, Cameron said. Vermillion students scored especially strong in English and reading, he said.

- In reading, Vermillion students averaged 24.4 compared to the statewide 22.3.
- In English, Vermillion students

## 2013-14 VERMILLION HIGH SCHOOL ACT SCORES

### ENGLISH/READING

- In reading, Vermillion students averaged 24.4 compared to the statewide 22.3
- In English, Vermillion students averaged 24 compared to the statewide average of 21.

### SCIENCE

- In Science, Vermillion averaged 23.4 compared to the statewide 22.1.

### MATH

- In Math, Vermillion averaged 22.5 compared to statewide 21.8.

averaged 24 compared to the statewide average of 21.

- In science, Vermillion averaged 23.4 compared to the statewide 22.1.
- In math, Vermillion averaged 22.5 compared to statewide 21.8.

While the district fell just short of its goal of a 24 composite score, students surpassed the goal in testing areas, noted school board vice chair Dave Stammer.

“In two of the four areas, we did reach 24,” he said. “That’s the first time in the last five years.”

Esping noted the improvement. “We’re moving in the right direction,” she said.

During the last five years, the number of Vermillion students taking the ACT test has dropped from 79 in 2010 to 61 in 2014.

However, the average score for each testing area has risen during that time.

22.2 in 2010 to 24 in 2014.

- In math, the score rose from 22.2 in 2010 to 22.5 in 2014.
- In reading, the score rose from 22.9 in 2010 to 24.4 in 2014.
- In science, the score rose from 22.5 in 2010 to 23.4 in 2014.

Of its ACT-tested students, Vermillion graduates are well prepared for college coursework.

The ACT report says 84 percent of Vermillion students are well prepared for college English composition, compared to 72 percent statewide.

In addition, 66 percent of Vermillion’s students are well prepared for college social science, compared to the state’s 51 percent.

Also, 62 percent of Vermillion’s students are well prepared for college biology compared to 46 percent statewide.

Vermillion ties the statewide average with 52 percent of its students

well prepared for college algebra.

In a final category, Vermillion stands at 46 percent of its ACT-tested students meeting all four categories compared to 32 percent statewide.

ACT research has shown the rigor of coursework, rather than simply the number of core courses, exerts the greatest impact on ACT performance and college readiness.

To ensure students are prepared for college and work, ACT recommends a number of steps: common focus, high expectations, rigorous curriculum, student counseling and the measurement and evaluation of progress.

Esping credited a team effort for the district’s ACT improvements.

“We are proud of the numbers and proud of the community for supporting us,” she said.

## LAW ENFORCEMENT RECORDS

### Vermillion City Police Dept.

08/31/2014 0:21:00 — Caller reported her intoxicated sister has assault her and their mother. Investigation revealed the adult sister had assaulted the caller and their mother when told to leave the residence after an argument.

08/31/2014 2:40:00 — Officers saw a man drinking from a beer while walking on the sidewalk. The man hid the beer as officers approached. Officers confronted the man who admitted to having the beer and he was identified as a juvenile. He was turned over to a responsible party and the charges were referred to the States Attorney.

08/31/2014 9:17:00 — Caller reported that person(s) unknown entered their home through a basement door and left through the back door sometime during the night. Under investigation.

08/31/2014 9:45:00 — Officers received a report of a stolen vehicle. The vehicle was later recovered and returned to the owner.

08/31/2014 11:28:00 — Officers received a call requesting a welfare check on a family member reference a possible domestic altercation. Contact was made with the female and she confirmed a domestic altercation had occurred. Officers were later able to make contact with the involved male to complete the investigation. He was arrested for domestic violence assault and a bond order violation.

08/31/2014 23:40:00 — Officers stopped a vehicle for careless driving. The driver was intoxicated and was arrested and cited for DWI, careless

driving, and open container in a motor vehicle.

09/02/2014 1:21:00 — Officers received a report of several parked vehicle with broken windows. Investigation is ongoing.

09/02/2014 1:26:00 — Officers received a report of a broken window on a vehicle. While investigating this incident, three other vehicles were identified in the area with broken windows. Investigation is ongoing.

09/02/2014 5:31:00 — Officers received a report of a window broken on a vehicle. Investigation is ongoing.

09/02/2014 12:27:00 — Officers received information of a vehicle being entered and items missing. Investigation is ongoing.

09/03/2014 8:02:00 — Officers received a report of a disc golf bag being stolen from Prentis Park. Investigation is ongoing.

09/03/2014 18:53:00 — Officers took a report of an attempted scam from an individual who had posted an item for sale on Craigslist. The seller had received a fraudulent check from the potential buyer and turned the check and contact information over to the police department for investigation.

09/04/2014 0:22:00 — Officers stopped a vehicle for driving on the wrong side of the road. The driver was intoxicated and was arrested for DWI.

09/04/2014 3:01:00 — Officers received information of an intoxicated female subject in need of assistance. She was found to be under 21 and had a fictitious license in her possession. The female was cited for underage consumption.

09/05/2014 20:16:00 — Officers received a complaint of a male subject contacting a female against the restrictions of a no contact order. Officers investigated the incident and the case has been referred for charges.

09/05/2014 23:55:00 — Officers stopped a vehicle for driving without headlights illuminated. The driver was intoxicated and was arrested for DWI.

09/06/2014 0:58:00 — Officers had contact with a female with an open container in the downtown area. The female was cited for the infraction and released.

09/06/2014 1:22:00 — Officers had contact with a male subject who was found urinating in public. The male was cited for the infraction and released.

09/06/2014 10:16:00

Officers received a report of a stolen vehicle. The vehicle was later located and returned to the owner.

### Clay County Sheriff's Office

08/31/2014 0:54:00 — A caller reported a vehicle swerving on Highway 46. A deputy located the vehicle and also observed swerving. The vehicle was stopped and the driver was not intoxicated but was sleepy. The driver was cited for driving with a suspended driver’s license and, no insurance.

08/31/2014 1:50:00 — A caller reported a driver who appeared intoxicated near Meckling. A deputy responded but the vehicle was no longer in the area.

08/31/2014 15:48:00 — A vehicle was stopped and the driver was cited for a stop sign violation on Bluff Road.

08/31/2014 16:23:00 — A deputy investigated a report of a hit and run accident where a vehicle struck a mailbox north of Wakonda.

09/01/2014 0:56:00 — A deputy assisted a Vermillion Police officer with a domestic dispute in Vermillion.

09/01/2014 8:23:00 — A woman was transported from Vermillion to the Human Services Center in Yankton for an involuntary mental health commitment.

09/01/2014 8:35:00 — Deputies mediated a dispute between a mother and daughter in Meckling.

09/01/2014 11:56:00 — A deputy responded to a report of mules on 302nd St north of Vermillion. The owner was able to catch the mules and resolve the issue.

09/01/2014 21:05:00 — A deputy assisted a driver having problems changing a tire on a camper on the Highway 50 bypass.

09/02/2014 7:55:00 — A deputy investigated a report of a vehicle stolen while it was parked at a business east of Vermillion. The vehicle was located in Sioux Falls on September 6. The driver was arrested.

09/02/2014 8:55:00 — The school resource officer cited a driver for exhibition driving in the high school parking lot.

09/03/2014 17:06:00 — A caller reported a man appeared to be having medical issues along Highway 50 west of Vermillion. A deputy responded but the man was no longer present.

09/03/2014 18:12:00 — A deputy received a report of a possible protection order violation. It was learned that the incident occurred in Lincoln County and the Lincoln County Sheriff’s Office is investigating.

09/03/2014 18:35:00 — Deputies served a protection order to a man in

Wakonda. The order required the man to surrender firearms. The firearms were surrendered without incident.

09/04/2014 7:59:00 — A vehicle was stopped and the driver was cited for speeding in Burbank.

09/04/2014 8:18:00 — A vehicle was stopped and the driver was cited for speeding on Burbank Road near Vermillion.

09/04/2014 10:46:00 — A rural resident reported receiving a scam telephone call with the caller stating that she was to pay fines to the IRS or be arrested. Since this was recognized as a scam attempt, no money was lost. The scam caller was from overseas.

09/04/2014 18:37:00 — An inmate was transported from the Union County Jail to the Clay County Jail to be booked on a Clay County warrant.

09/05/2014 2:36:00 A deputy responded to a report of an injury accident somewhere between Vermillion and Yankton. The accident was located in Yankton County.

09/05/2014 18:26:00 — A caller reported a suspicious vehicle parked on his property. A deputy located the vehicle and found that the owner did have permission to park there.

09/05/2014 20:09:00 — A rural Meckling resident reported an employee had accidentally damaged a gravel road. They had repaired the damage. The township supervisor was notified.

09/06/2014 6:58:00 — A deputy responded to an injury accident on 306th St. Patients were transported from the scene by ambulance.

09/06/2014 22:44:00 — A deputy investigated a report of vandalism in Wakonda where vandals uprooted flowers from community flower pots.

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people, from helping churches, from helping the parks, to helping elementary schools. Our list is really long.”

Most of the students are taken by bus to various locations to begin their volunteering while some may walk to their assignment. They can go out as far as the countryside or just help a local park blocks from the high school.

“It was a lot of fun last year,” sophomore Riley Peters said. “We went to Prentis Park and had to cut down tree limbs. Then we had to clean up the field house on the field.”

“It’s a good way to give back to the community. My friends really liked it just being out helping. It makes you feel like you have grown up a lot. You aren’t in school. You are out doing something to help people.”

During their volunteer excursions, students will get to take a lunch break, sponsored by the City of Vermillion Chamber and Development Company and then get right back at it.

“Tanager Volunteer Day is a fantastic example of a group of people coming together, with the organized effort to make a difference in people’s lives, in one single day,” Nate Welch, executive director for the Vermillion Chamber and Development Company, said. “The other great thing about it is that it is done by mostly kids in the



Who said it isn’t fun giving back to your community?

Photo Courtesy of Vermillion High School

community. To watch them learn - hands on - how they have the power to make a difference in people’s lives, in only a day is a lesson they’ll hopefully take with them for years.”

Volunteer Day’s importance is something not lost on the town, according to Billberg.

“The community each year can’t get enough and can’t thank us enough,” she said. “We do all kinds of different things and it’s more rewarding for our kids because they can see what they can do and that they can make a difference.”

“Some of them cried because they were able to help people in that way.”

The program is similar to one – the AWOL program – at the University of South Dakota. That program’s mantra states that its mission is to “immerse students in transformational service-learning experiences to expose them to diverse

situations, people and perspectives, and empower them to become life-long agents of social change.”

Billberg said that volunteer programs like these are growing nationwide.

“We know it’s growing across campuses across the country,” Billberg said and added that her students can’t get enough of the helping aspect. “We have our kids volunteering at the library or at the welcome tables.”

“Some of our kids are in AWOL because they ask

‘what can I do next?’”

It can also teach a lesson in humility.

“It was a fun way to get involved in the community and it feels good that were able to help people,” sophomore Morgan Herbster said. “Last year I helped at Faith Fellowship Church and we went and organized clothes for families that can’t afford clothing for their younger kids and that makes you grateful for what you have.”

## A PUBLIC NOTICE TO THE LANDOWNERS, RENTERS, AND ACREAGE OWNERS OF SPINK TOWNSHIP:

For purposes of public safety and road maintenance in winter, please mow the ditches adjacent to your property by October 1 and clear the Right of Way of debris, rocks, branches and/or trees by November 15. Thank you very much!

Spink Township Board of Supervisors

## St. Agnes students to perform at Diocesan 125th kickoff

St. Agnes School students will take part next week in a historic event.

The students will perform during the Sept. 19 celebration in Yankton kicking off the 125th anniversary of the Catholic Diocese of Sioux Falls.

The public is invited to the celebration on the Mount Marty College (MMC) campus.

Bishop Paul Swain will celebrate the Mass beginning at 10 a.m. in Cimpr Arena. Prelude music begins at 9:30 a.m.

The Mass will feature special music, including the St. Agnes School fourth and fifth graders of Vermillion and the Sacred Heart School third through eighth graders from Yankton. The students will perform during Holy Communion.

After the Mass and a short intermission, guest speaker Chris Padgett will present a program from 11:15 a.m. to noon. Padgett, a Chamberlain native, is a Catholic musician and motivational speaker.

The Yankton Daily Press & Dakotan is currently accepting applications for a

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