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OUR VIEW

Rogers sees remarkable turnaround

When Colleen Burns Jermain was appointed superintendent of Newport schools in January 2014, one of the goals the School Committee gave her was to improve the graduation rate at Rogers High School. This was a goal that deserved top priority, as the graduation rate for the school's Class of 2013 was just 71 percent.

For Jermain, it was a difficult task given the many downward trends in the city at the time. In 2013, Rogers had a dropout rate of 22 percent, and the chronic absentee rate was 38 percent for the 2012-13 school year, well over the state average rate of 24 percent.

And the problem was not just at the high school. In that same year, the chronic absentee rate at Thompson Middle School was 20 percent, compared to the state middle school average of 15 percent. The rate among students in kindergarten through third grade was 17 percent, compared to the state average of 12 percent.

The chronic absentee rates reflect the percentage of students who were enrolled in school for at least 90 days and

missed 18 days or more days of school. The number 18 was chosen because it is 10 percent of the 180-day school year.

Throughout the district, large percentages of students were missing large numbers of classes. When students are not in school, they are not learning, causing their test scores to drop. And when test scores drop, students lose interest and motivation and are more likely to drop out.

Despite these negative trends, Jermain was able to guide the school district to a quick turnaround. After steady increases, in 2016 the graduation rate at Rogers was 91 percent, the highest of any public high school in Newport County, according to a report released Monday by Kids Count. The

rates at Middletown and Tiverton high schools were 90 percent and Portsmouth High School was at 89 percent.

A look at the statewide graduation numbers also reveals some impressive results for Rogers. The city is behind only Pawtucket, Central Falls and Johnston for having the largest increase in high school graduation rates in the state from 2007 to 2016.

Jermain credits much of the success in turning around the graduation rate to the Accelerated Learning Program, which helps students keep on track at earning the credits they need to graduate, and catching up in areas where they have fallen behind. She also praised the Newport Project, which works with organizations in the community on science, math and English curriculum. The more than 40 students in this program work with groups like the Preservation Society of Newport County, Rose Island Foundation and Clean Ocean Access outside the school, she said.

These programs are examples not only of how the district is finding new ways to keep students interested in their work, but also how students are being offered help when and where they need it.

We hope the city continues this positive momentum and remains on the right track to improving the education of its students. These days, a high school degree is essential, and it is encouraging that more students in the city will have that foundation for further success.

