

The Real NFHS Graduation Rate? 93.9%

As the Niagara Falls City School District celebrates graduation with the Class of 2016, it is an appropriate time to reflect on graduation rates: how they are calculated and what they mean.

The rate calculated for the Niagara Falls City School District by the New York State Education Department, as for all districts in the State, is based on all the students who enter the high school as freshmen four years previous to the anticipated graduation date; in this case, all students who enrolled at NFHS in September 2011. So far, so good.

If a student leaves NFHS and goes to school elsewhere in the State, their data transfers to their new school. But if they leave the State and do not communicate their whereabouts to our District, they are counted as drop-outs.

How often does this happen? According to Assessment Administrator Marcia Capone—who tracks all such data—an average cohort (or class) loses about 80 students in this way over the course of four years.

That number does not include those who are known to have dropped out, a number that hovers around 20.

No one is happy to see 20 students drop out. But calculating the graduation rate using 100 (80 unaccounted for, 20 known drop outs), as opposed to 20, obviously depresses the rate as reported by NYSED.

The Senior class enrollment in June 2016 was 412. Of these, 387 graduated June 25, 2016. Of the 25 remaining, most will achieve graduation in August after summer school. Even at 387, that is a graduation rate of 93.9%.

If students come to school faithfully, put forth effort, and utilize the numerous safety nets in place for struggling students, they graduate, on time, in four years. It's that simple.

The NYSED graduation rates are fair in as much as all districts are calculated the same way; they are not a fair representation of how well high schools-or districts—are educating students in the classroom. And while we continue to work on attendance and communication with all students' families, the necessary element remains that to educate a student, he or she needs to be present and accounted for, as most students are.

Speaking of attendance, kudos to 2016 senior James Murphy, who missed not one day of school in 13 years. No surprise here-he graduated. Congratulations!