

Classmates of Virtual School Meet Each Other at Graduation

Duluth, Minn. - June 2, 2008 -

Posted on: Monday, 2 June 2008, 06:00 CDT

By Anna KurthSuperior Daily Telegram, Duluth News-Tribune, Minn.

Jun. 2--Three Superior-area teens had to drive more than 260 miles to their high school graduation over the weekend.

Last week, Marki Carlson and Samantha Johnson of Superior and Angel Petite of South Range were planning to graduate from Insight School in a ceremony at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. Insight School is a virtual charter high school of the Grantsburg School District.


The school, which serves 170 students, was chartered to serve students from throughout Wisconsin this year, said Jeff Bush, Insight School executive director.

Before they left, Carlson, Petite and Johnson talked about what it meant to them to be three of nine seniors in Insight School's first-ever graduating class. While the ceremony was to have all the tradition of a regular high school graduation -- complete with speeches from the valedictorian and salutatorian -- the three women said they would be meeting many of their classmates in person for the first time.

Petite had come to know some of her fellow graduates through online classes and chat sessions through Insight School.

"It will be interesting," she said of the ceremony. "It's always kind of fun to put the face to someone."

At times, students would put up their pictures during the school's online classroom sessions, but otherwise she had never seen her classmates, Petite said.

 The senior came to Insight School after being home-schooled since ninth grade. Petite said she decided to attend the virtual school for a more structured education. Johnson came to Insight from Superior High School for flexible scheduling as she gave birth to her son in February.

"I didn't really like all the drama in the high school," she said.

Instead of taking classes during the day, Johnson concentrated on school work when she could find a sitter for her son.

"I liked that I could do my work on my time," she said.

The students said taking the courses online was simple. All the assignments were available on a course page, and when students finished an assignment, they handed them in through a drop box on the course home page, Johnson said.

The school furnished the students with a laptop computer to use at home along with any books required by the curriculum. They completed their work independently, and teachers communicated with them through e-mail or live chat sessions with the entire class, Bush said.

The school must meet state requirements and follow Wisconsin standards; classes are just presented in a different medium than the face-to-face classroom, he said.

Other than being an online school, Insight doesn't differ much from Superior High School, Carlson said. There are deadlines for assignments and tests. Insight students have class time with their teachers, but the school offers more independence, she said.

Petite said she was surprised by how many social opportunities the school offered. She wrote for Puma Tracks, the school's newspaper. Students also can participate in a book club, yearbook, stock market simulation, National Honor Society or photography clubs. The school also offers get-togethers, she said.

All three women said they were excited for their graduation.

"I think it's good," Petite said. "It's very nice that we have the ceremony and everything -- that is definitely one thing I would have missed if I didn't go to Insight -- having a ceremony," she said, because she would have been home-schooled. "It was a very good experience overall."

Petite plans to attend the University of Wisconsin-Superior this fall. Johnson plans to work and save money to go to college for a nursing degree. Carlson plans to attend college to get a degree in early childhood education.

Anna Kurth covers education. Call her at (715) 395-5019 or e-mail akurth@superior.telegram.com.

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Source: Duluth News-Tribune (Duluth, Minn.)