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OVUHS chosen for Brilliant Pathways to help rural students attend college

BY ARIADNE WILL

BRANDON — New York nonprofit College For Every Student (CFES) has selected 20 schools in Vermont and upstate New York to receive funding for college-readiness programming, starting this fall.

The announcement for those selected for the program — called Brilliant Pathways — came June 1.

The 20 schools selected include five in Vermont and 15 in New York, out of 72 schools that applied to the \$1.5 million program.

Otter Valley Union High School is one of the five Vermont schools selected to participate.

OVUHS Director of Guidance Meredith McCartney is facilitating the program at OVUHS. McCartney says the

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OVUHS Director of Guidance*

program will offer not just college preparatory resources but will get students thinking more in terms of career choice.

“(Brilliant Pathways) brings in a lot of resources where they connect our students with large corporations,” she told the Reporter. “They’ve had a lot of success working with middle

school students and getting them excited early about a variety of careers.”

She said that thinking early about careers means students will be better prepared to choose educational opportunities that better fit with their own career goals.

At OVUHS, the program will be associated with students in grades 7-9. McCartney said that this will allow for a more proactive approach.

Brilliant Pathways programming comes in response to documented connections between rural students and poverty.

CFES notes that rural students are far less likely to be enrolled in postsecondary education: the National Center for Education Statistics reports that only
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29.3% of rural Americans ages 18-24 are enrolled at a college or university. This is in contrast to the 47.7% of urban Americans in that same age group enrolled at a college or university.

At OVUHS, McCartney estimates that around 45-50% of students pursue postsecondary education at a college or university, while another 20% often go to technical school.

But McCartney said that these numbers have been on the decline in recent years, both because of the COVID-19 pandemic and because of the cost of college.

"(The costs) become somewhat prohibitive," she said.

And attending school is just half the battle for rural communities, says Brilliant Pathways CEO Rick Dalton.

"Secondary school graduates who go off to college are, in many cases, forced to leave their

communities," he said in an interview Tuesday. Dalton added that this is especially true when student loans pile up.

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At a time when two thirds of all jobs — as well as 80% of

jobs paying a median income of \$65,000 — require postsecondary education, providing access and information to rural students is a crucial step towards educational and economic opportunities.

With resources provided by the Brilliant Pathways program — which include certified college- and career-readiness advisor trainings, partnerships with 200 colleges and universities and the expectation that all participating students complete a career readiness plan annually — students at the selected rural schools will have better awareness of the opportunities available to them.

And Dalton says that the 20 New York and Vermont schools are just the beginning.

"We see this program evolving into a national model," he said. "You see the slipping rates of college-going in rural America and the very high dropout rates. We're looking to change that."