

# Logged out

## Small percentage of RNeSU remote learning students are MIA

By LEE J. KAHRIS

BRANDON — You can lead a student to the laptop and provide them with free WiFi, but you can't make them log on.

That is the bottom line for the handful of Rutland Northeast students who are learning remotely, but not logging on or connecting with teachers during a very different pandemic educa-

tion.

There are roughly 1,500 students in the district. RNeSU Superintendent Jeanne Collins said that of the 200 district students that are learning remotely full time and not entering the school buildings at all, 22 are not connected or engaging with teach-

*(See Logged Out, Page 12)*

# Logged out

*(Continued from page 1)*  
ers and staff for their education.

Of those, 151 remote learning students are at Otter Valley Union High School, and 17 of those students are not connected or logging on regularly, Collins said.

And lack of Internet access is not the reason. RNeSU pays for WiFi access, gave students in need hotspots at home or near home, and pays for the data.

The remaining five students not logging on are at the elementary level. Collins said many efforts have been made across the board to engage these students and their families.

"The teachers have tried to reach out to the parents," Collins said. "(Neshobe Principal) Judi Pulsifer has gone to the homes and driveways and asked, 'What's in the way? How can we help you?' And the meeting may go well, but not the follow through (on the part of the students or parents)."

Collins said the reasons behind the absenteeism are as varied as the families involved. Often, parents and guardians are working and the students are home alone.

"Some parents are working two jobs and don't have the bandwidth to also do the education piece," she said. "Some adolescents don't want to tell parents what's going on. Some kids prefer to work and make money. In some cases there just isn't the supervision there."

But despite the reasons, what the students are missing is what they can get out of in-person learning, Collins said, even in a pandemic wearing a mask, six-feet away.

"Those face-to-face connections aren't there and kids don't feel connected to the school," she said. "Every student should know they have an adult in their corner, someone to advocate for them and to push them."

But it could be so much worse.

A recent article in the *Boston Globe* found that roughly 40% of high school juniors and seniors in Boston were chronically absent last fall. That's 2,900 high school juniors and seniors who were missing at least 10% of their classes from September through December. *The Globe* reported that was 500 more students than was typical before the pandemic.

Causes of this disparity included economic challenges posed by the pandemic, forcing students to work to support their families, mental health challenges or lack of access to reliable Internet or laptops.

Many states, however, are soon poised to re-open schools to

*"[Neshobe Principal] Judi Pulsifer has gone to the homes... and asked, 'What's in the way? How can we help you?' And the meeting may go well, but not the follow through."*

*Jeanne Collins, RNeSU Superintendent*

person learning, including Vermont. Gov. Phil Scott said the state could reopen schools possibly as early as next month. That would solve the problem of students not logging on remotely, even though Collins said she would not make in-person learning mandatory this year.

"I feel I need to honor those that want to stay remote," she said. "It's a pandemic year. Everyone has different comfort levels with what works."

Using the federal COVID relief money the state has coming, Collins said she is looking at building intensive summer programming paired with a recreation component to help students who are behind catch up.

"For the older kids, it's about recovering (academic) credits," she said. "For the younger kids, it's the skills they might be missing or rusty on."

The superintendent said she is looking at what the staffing needs will be this summer, and expects to do some hiring. Either way, all of the kids in the district are on her radar and she's waiting on funding.

"Public school is about having a wide variety of ability levels in the classroom," she said. "What kind of COVID staffing and funding are we getting to support that? That's the question."