

Wells tapped to lead Neshobe School

By LEE J. KAHR

BRANDON — Vicki Wells's commute is about to get a lot shorter.

The 56-year-old lives in Brandon and last week was chosen as the next principal of Brandon's Neshobe Elementary School, which is 1.5 miles from her house.

She also lives "literally right around the corner" from current Neshobe Principal Judi Pulsifer, who is retiring in June.

Wells was never far, having spent the past 17 years as the Director of Student Services for the Addison Central Supervisory Union in Middlebury. She and her husband, Bob, lived in Brandon some 20 years ago before moving to East Middlebury to raise their two children, now grown. Two years ago, the couple moved back to Brandon and into the Smith Block on Center Street before moving to the Forrest Brook development off North Street last September.

"My husband and I have always loved Brandon and are happy we are back in town," Wells said. "I never thought about a principalship. This popped open and it just felt like an incredible opportunity. It was really appealing. I can't explain it except it just felt like the right job at the right time. Someone said it felt like coming home and that's exactly how it feels."

Wells was chosen after a Search Advisory Committee of parents and educators was formed and two community forums were held to give the public a chance to meet the candidates. The search was narrowed to three candidates before Wells was chosen.

Rutland Northeast



VICKI WELLS

Superintendent Jeanne Collins said the process worked well.

"With community and staff feedback from a public forum with Vicki, she quickly rose to the top," Collins said. "She will bring to the school and the district a strong background in systems and a passion for putting the students first."

I am looking forward to Vicki taking a strong school legacy put in place by long time principal Judi Pulsifer and continuing to move the school forward to meet the needs of all of our students."

THE PATH HOME

Wells graduated from Castleton State University with a B.S. in elementary education and minors in special education and early childhood education. She earned a Master of Education degree from the University of Vermont, and then earned a Doctor of Education degree from UVM as well, with a major in educational leadership and policy studies.

Wells said she never intended to earn her doctoral degree, but there was a significant scholarship and funding available.

"It was the perfect opportunity, but looking back, I don't know how I did it," she said. "I had young

children at the time. I look back and I'm like, Wow..."

From 2016-2018, Wells was also named ACSU superintendent of student services.

Before joining the ACSU, Wells was a special education consultant with the Vermont Department of Education from 2000-2004, and from 1994-1999.

Wells was also an associate special education coordinator for the Addison Northeast Supervisory Union from June 1999- September 2000.

Early in her career, Wells was a classroom teacher at Shoreham Elementary School, West Haven Elementary School, and Williston Central School, and in Danvers, Mass.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

Wells's vast experience in special education is valuable and will be a key component of her job at Neshobe. She said she prefers a holistic approach to special education, where children are treated as a whole learning individual, not just as their learning or emotional issue.

"A lot of it is knowing the system," she said. "But as we've gone through the years in special education, I've found a very siloed system. The reality is, kids are kids and they shouldn't be siloed into the set of services or that the goal

is to meld into one system to serve all services. We shouldn't have to label a student to get the services they need. It puts them in buckets."

Wells said a special education system can be built to bring students from where they are to their net benchmark, wherever that may be.

"One of the things I've found over many, many years is that once a student was eligible for special education, contact with the family came from special education. It shifts who the parents communicate with. All kids are

general education first and we have to shift to that system. That's where your highest core content comes through."

It was her work with the Vermont Agency of Education that solidified and expanded her special education experience.

"I spent a lot of time working with the Federal Department of Education looking at special education on the national level," she said.

Wells has also been in charge of all the special education services at Addison Central, as well as all the Americans with Disabilities Act compliance, and all the hazing, harassment and bullying issues that come up. She is also responsible for writing federal grants and special education Medicare grants. Additionally, she oversees the nurses.

"A shout out to all the nurses," she said, "they have done the heavy lifting this year."

BACK WITH THE KIDS

Going back to interacting with kids one-on-one is one reason Wells applied for the Neshobe principalship. Her current role as director of student services at ACSU keeps her from that more interpersonal interaction. Add the pandemic into it and she has even less contact with students.

That will soon change when she takes the reins at Neshobe on July 1.

"The pandemic helped (make up my mind), because I miss kids," she said. "I miss being in one location and I really miss the opportunity to see kids grow. I absolutely love Brandon and to be part of the community not just as a community member... the opportunity to take the years of experience I have... just being in the building and seeing the kids grow. The principal's role is an integral part of the larger community, and I can't wait."

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— Jeanne Collins, RNeSU Superintendent

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