

# Viola Rand and Alton Elementary Schools

October 2021 Report for the RSU34 School Board

## October 8 Inservice Day

The timing of the inservice day was fortuitous. Staff was at that point where an infusion of time and calm were most welcome. In planning for the inservice, I polled staff to see what they would find to be the most beneficial use of the day. The responses indicated a host of individual projects and meetings that would help staff get ahead of the curve. One recurring request was to prepare materials to have ready when students are required to quarantine and remote learning plans are needed. Some staff indicated meeting with literacy, math and Ch 104 coaches during the course of the day would be helpful. Updating go-bags, prepping workshop stations, collaborating with grade level teams and/or teaching partners were all deemed necessary and worthwhile. Staff in both schools ordered out for lunch and were able to enjoy a more social lunch than on typical school days. I received a great deal of feedback throughout the day and after that the individualized opportunities were greatly appreciated and helped to reduce the stress level that staff have been experiencing.

## Close Contacts, Contact Tracing, Pooled Testing & Quarantine

During the 2020-21 school year, there were no close contacts at AES or VRS. We also saw very few occasions of student or staff quarantines due to outside exposures. This year is proving to be a very different story. In the first week of school, two grades at Alton Elementary school and one at Viola Rand School went out on quarantine. These were whole class exposures and the teachers taught the class remotely for the length of the quarantine. Since then, there has been another grade at AES and two more at VRS, with a likelihood of two more pending. All told, there have been 346 student days of quarantine absences due to Covid in-school exposures so far this year. This does not include quarantines of individual students from outside exposures. The three most recent classes to have exposures have created more difficult situations for the teachers. The pooled testing that keeps more students in class has made a 2-sided dilemma. With it, about half the class has been able to continue attending school, while the other half is out for the ten days. The earlier quarantines were more manageable for remote instruction since the teacher was able to reach all students with one plan. Now, with the split class, teachers don't have the flexibility to meet with students remotely during the day. The instruction was much more effective when all students were in the same boat. An additional concern is the lack of substitutes when staff are out for extended time. Last Tuesday, there were two people out sick in one school. There were no subs to be found, so we were making do as best we could. When the messages came through that both had tested positive, the notion of continuing in the "making do" mode for a much longer length of time was troubling. This year is proving to be far more disruptive to student learning than last year was, even with the recent addition of pooled testing.

**Maintenance:** Our new Maintenance director, Brent Fournier, has hit the ground running and has been getting up to speed with the school facilities in both towns. CedarWorks play equipment has been assembled and is a hit with students!

**Pre-k transportation:** The Pre-K van that transports students from Alton to Viola Rand School received new graphics on Friday. It looks great!

**Fire Safety:** Both schools had fire safety assemblies in the past week. It is always good information to review with students and the red plastic hats are iconic!

**Music hire:** We have hired OTHS alum Jessup Henderson as an ed tech 3 to provide music instruction at AES, VRS and in the lower grades at OTEs. He is in his element doing exactly what he went to school for and the students are responding to him most favorably! In adherence to the Covid restrictions, he has even given a flute lesson on the benches outside my office window!

**NLH webinars:** Northern Light Healthcare has made regularly scheduled webinars available to admin. I have found them to be very informative and helpful.

