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Staffing shortages continue to stymie RNESU schools

BY ANGELO LYNN

BRANDON — Ahead of a RNESU school board meeting this Wednesday, Oct. 20, Superintendent Jeanne Collins highlighted the continued staff shortages and mounting stress on faculty and staff as the biggest problems the school was facing.

In a interview exchange on Tuesday, Collins said staff shortages amounted to being “down two custodians, three teachers, three long-term substitutes for teachers on leave, three bus drivers, para-educators and significantly down on substitutes in general.”

“As a result,” she said, “administrators are all subbing for classes and we are not able to provide all interventions in academics that students need. We have not been fully staffed yet this year. We did have three candidates for teacher accept the position and then not show up. It is very frustrating and stressful for students, parents and staff.”

The shortages also have impacted bus routes, which has been a frustration for the school, kids and parents alike.

“Bus routes are changed daily depending on whether we have any

absences in our remaining drivers,” Collins said, adding she understood the inconvenience that has caused parents but noted they were working hard to fix the problem but labor shortages everywhere are compounding the problem.

Asked how she could see the labor shortage being resolved, she said she was unsure.

“It is a good question as it is not as simple as throwing money at a problem. Pay does play a role, of course, as fast food restaurants and other similar businesses are raising pay significantly. However, even with higher pay, there does not seem to be a workforce out there. I believe it is a state issue, not a local issue, and we need to address it as a state. Meanwhile, we are increasing our outreach, looking at pay, and doing what we can do to recruit new hires.”

As for students acting out with behavioral issues and disrupting classes, Collins said that too was a statewide problem that had more than one cause, including the hang-over from 18 months of pandemic related separation.

“We, too, have seen students re-
(See *Staffing shortages*, Page 5)



CASTLETON UNIVERSITY field hockey players recently contributed a work day for Brandon's recreation department under the direction of CU's new Field Hockey Coach Emily Lowell, a former OV field hockey star. Below team members painted picnic tables at Estabrook Park.

Field hockey love

Former OV standout Emily Lowell leads CU team



BY ANGELO LYNN

BRANDON — A couple of weeks ago, an out-of-town sports team came to Brandon to donate a day of free labor. Brandon's economic development and recreation director Bill Moore welcomed the help and put the Castleton University field hockey team to work moving a big pile of woodchips at the Seminary Hill Park playground and painting picnic tables at Estabrook Park.

What's the connection with the CU team and Brandon, you ask?

It goes back several years to when Emily Lowell was a star field hockey player at Otter Valley from 2010-2014. She and her sister Allison Lowell both had outstanding careers in field hockey at OV and later at CU with Emily racking up 33 career goals for the Spartans and Allison having 22 goals and 21 assists.

(See *Emily Lowell*, Page 23)



Boo-tiful Brandon

BRANDON BUSINESS GET in the Halloween spirit.

Reporter photo/Angelo Lynn

Cosmos, Otters embody sportsmanship

BY ANGELO LYNN

SPRINGFIELD — This past Saturday, the Otter Valley field hockey team met visiting Springfield in which both teams came out as winners by seeing close-up what good sportsmanship means.

It all started back at the Otter's Homecoming game against Springfield on September 25. As OV Coach Jodie Keith recalls “as soon as the Springfield team

walked onto the field, they began saying, ‘Good morning! Good luck today! We're so happy to be here!’ The coach and the players had such positive attitudes and were so happy to be at OV playing field hockey, it was contagious for our team.

“I remember multiple OV players saying, ‘they are so nice! They are so sweet! We should have invited them to our team lunch after

the game.’

“Since we were not able to invite them to our lunch that day,” Keith continued, “everyone (including the OV parents) wanted to do something special for the Springfield team to thank them for
(See *Sportsmanship*, Page 19)



Staffing shortage

(Continued from Page 1)

turn not ready to be in school, at all ages,” wrote Collins. “Student behavior is a normal occurrence pre-Covid. We need to remember we teach kids, children who have not yet learned coping mechanisms. On top of that, many have been out of school or had a disrupted school for 18 months. Elementary seems better able to return, as they were in school four days a week last year. Middle and high school are more dysregulated and seem to need more structure and review of basic school behavior. It is a very unusual dynamic. On top of that, the stress and anxiety of COVID as well as the political unrest in the country also play a role.”

While board members are working on a budget plan for the next year to put before voters, their bigger concerns have been the immediacy of the Covid-related issues, many of which have impacted staffing.

“Staffing is the largest issue we have right now,” Collins said, adding that a report she gave to the Barstow board a few weeks ago reflected her overview of the problems facing areas schools. In that report she emphasized the impact Covid has had on schools included: staffing shortages, mask mandates, managing vaccinations and clinics, testing in schools, quarantines and the effect that has on learning, and the impact that hybrid schooling has had on learning.

But other issues haven’t gone away, including:

- the challenges of equity and access to technology, LGBTQ issues,

racial and socio economic impacts and access to learning environment;

- facility needs, including lead testing in schools, PBC testing, aging facilities, HVAC systems and ongoing maintenance;

- enrollment is holding steady but has shown a decline over the past 10 years, which affects school budgets;

- trauma needs in schools, which requires staff training and additional resources;

- behavior needs as students return to school after being disrupted for 18 months;

- the public expecting schools to deliver full service to students, including dealing with mental health issues, nutrition, clothing, food, eyeglasses, homelessness, and child care;

- cyber-bullying and the social media impacts students;

- the need to provide hardware and internet to level the playing field for all students, and a continued need to integrate technology into lessons and be able to switch to virtual at a moment’s notice.

Through it all, Collins said she appreciated the public’s patience as the schools dealt with the issues as best as they could, noting that Otter Valley seemed to be handling the hardships as well as and better than many other schools.

“I appreciate that our community has been patient and collaborative with the schools and supportive of our children and our staff,” she said. “The disruption of schools affects families as well. We are in a hard place, but we pull together. I am fortunate to be part of this district.”



Framed

FALL COLORS FRAME this section of road in Leicester.

Reporter photo/Angelo Lynn

Breaking point

(Continued from Page 4)

their plates.

The effects of this crisis are showing. Even more is put upon our school workers, with superintendents, principals, teachers and other school staff being asked to serve lunches, administer Covid tests, clean the school before and after hours, and spend increasing time managing student behavioral and mental health issues.

With this comes the wear and tear of stress and the feeling of helplessness that occurs when dedicated, caring people are put in situations where they are overwhelmed by impossible demands.

There are no simple solutions. But the first step to solving a problem is recognizing it. And this is a step I have not adequately seen from the governor or Education Secretary Dan French.

I encourage Secretary French to conduct a listening tour of school boards and hear from board members and school administrators about the challenges that are being faced by

schools.

I encourage the state to give thought to how it can give schools meaningful support and ensure that its actions are alleviating the situation, not adding more to the plate.

The dedicated people who care for our kids and schools have done a top-rate job during the most challenging of circumstances. But their heroics

cannot be sustained.

We must, as a state and as individual communities, work together to help bring our schools and the people who work hard for our children through this current phase of the pandemic.

Note: Jim Murphy of Montpelier is chair of the Montpelier Roxbury School Board.

Curtis Hier, M.Ed.

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