

# The REPORTER

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Wednesday, November 3, 2021

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## RNESU: Yes, schools are stressed, but they're dealing

BY ANGELO LYNN

BRANDON — To say schools across the state are stressed is an understatement. That they are in crisis is a more accurate description, and one that school officials don't shy away from. But it doing so, it's not to say that academic progress is not being made for a vast majority of the students.

In a 90-minute conversation this Monday with RNeSU Superintendent Jeanné Collins, Lothrop Elementary Principal Debbie Alexander and Lothrop Guidance counselor Jed Pauls we discussed what difficulties the schools are facing, student dysregulation, and other issues of student misbehavior — as well as student successes.

The take-away is that the Covid pandemic has amplified a lot of stresses that are typical in any year and in any school system, but it's the staff shortages that have caused the student-teacher support system to break down and cause

moments of havoc at area schools.

"Right now, we are very, very, very — how many very's can I say — short-staffed," said Collins. "Right now we're having problems finding substitutes. We have no back-up to come on when

teachers or support personnel are out and that has caused a great deal of stress on the faculty and administration. We have a shortage of bus drivers. Right now the system is very stressed."

On that particular Monday, 17

staff at the Otter Valley Union high school were out on various forms of leave, sickness or quarantines. What that does is limit the ability of the rest of the staff to address individual student needs when dysregulation occurs.

Collins explained schools typically identify about 5-7 % of the student body in any school that has a particular need to more fully develop at any given time. Those needs could be academic — say, a

(See Schools' dealing, Page 6)



### Tough defense

THE OTTER DEFENSE held Mill River in check throughout much of their quarterfinal contest, stopping the Minuteman's Ross Badgley on this run. Badgley would later break open a 44-yard-run for a touchdown, but it wasn't enough as the Otters prevailed 12-6 in a game in which the second half was played in a light rain.

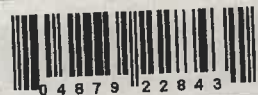
Reporter photo/Angelo Lynn

## GET READY: VT minimum wage jumps to \$12.55 in 2022

Montpelier, Vt. — The Vermont Department of Labor has announced an increase to the State's minimum wage. Beginning January 1, 2022, the State's minimum wage will become \$12.55 per hour. This is an increase of \$0.80 from the current minimum wage of \$11.75.

This annual adjustment also impacts the minimum wage for tipped employees. The Basic Tipped Wage Rate for service, or "tipped employees," equals 50% of the full minimum wage. On January 1, 2022, the tipped minimum wage will increase from \$5.88 to \$6.28 per hour.

(See Minimum wage, Page 16)



## 'Trash-talk' allegedly used racial slur at OV/MR game

BRANDON — RNeSU Superintendent Jeanné Collins released a statement on Monday, Nov. 1 referring to an alleged incident at the OVUHS-Mill River High School football game in which players may have used racial slurs in an escalated instance of trash-talking among the players, Collins said. In a statement posted on the school's website, Collins wrote: "On Saturday, October 30, 2021 it was reported to Otter Valley and Mill River school officials

that there were allegations of racial slurs being used by athletes during a playoff football game. Athletes reported escalating "trash talk" during the game, and the allegations of racial slurs were brought to school leaders' attention after the game was completed. "The Vermont Principals' Association's Third Party Investigative resources will be utilized immediately and an investigation will commence as quickly as possible to determine if there

were any violations of school district Hazing, Harassment, and

Bullying policies.

(See 'Trash-talk', Page 16)

## Statewide policy to address sports incidents

Editor's note: This story was filed in mid-October, establishing a school policy to address verbal abuse during athletic events.

BY PETER D'AURIA, VTDIGGER

Vermont school officials are strengthening procedures for reporting and investigating racist and sexist abuse during sporting events after a series of incidents around the state caused alarm.

In early October, allegations of hate speech at high school sports games have shed light on the widespread harassment that Vermont student-athletes face during games. (See Statewide policy, Page 16)



# Minimum wage

(Continued from Page 1)  
tipped minimum wage are adjusted annually in accordance with Vermont law and take effect at the start of the new year. Any employee who believes

they are not being compensated fairly, according to this law, is encouraged to contact the Department of Labor's Wage and Hour Unit at 802-951-4083 or online at [Labor.Vermont.gov/](http://Labor.Vermont.gov/)

## Rights-and-Wages.

Additional information on the Vermont Department of Labor and its resources may be found at [Labor.Vermont.gov](http://Labor.Vermont.gov/).

# 'Trash-talk'

(Continued from Page 1)  
"Both schools intend to cooperate with and fully support the investigative process in order to protect all students and student athletes. Ultimately, leaders from Otter Valley and Mill River will be working together to

process and address the incident through restorative practices in an effort to bring the matter to a satisfactory resolution." The statement was signed by Collins, OVU Principal James Avery, OVU Athletic Director Steven Keith, as well as Supt.

David Younce of MRUUSD, MRU Principal Tyler Weideman and MRS Athletic Director Kim Maniery. No further comments were offered pending further investigation of the incident.

# Brandon Fire department log

The Brandon Fire Department responded to the following emergency calls during October:

- Oct.2** Lower Plains Road, Salisbury, Mutual Aid
- Oct.3** Conant Square, Alarm Activation
- Oct.4** Mulcahy Drive, Assist EMS
- Oct.5** Ray Forest Rd., Motor Vehicle Accident
- Oct.6** Mulcahy Drive, Alarm Activation
- Oct.7** Brebeuf Terrace, Leicester, Alarm Activation
- Oct.14** School House Road, Leicester, Alarm Activation

- Oct.15** DeLorm Road, and Ferson Road, Motor Vehicle Accident
- Oct.15** Champlain Street, Motor Vehicle Accident
- Oct.16** Carver Street, Structure Fire
- Oct.18** Pittsford, Station, Pittsford, Standby
- Oct.18** Carver Street, Unpermitted Burn
- Oct.21** Mulcahy Drive, Assist EMS
- Oct.28** McConnel Road and Route 7, Motor Vehicle Accident
- Oct.28** Wheeler Road Alarm Activation
- Oct.31** Union Street, Alarm

## Activation

By this time, you should have started your preparations for winter. Your home heating equipment should have been serviced and your chimneys cleaned and inspected. The batteries in you smoke detectors and carbon monoxide alarms changed. Plans for putting on your winter tires should be made, if not already put on your vehicles. Outside water supplies should be shut off and drained. Snow shovels should be dug out from the back of the shed or garage. Sand and salt stockpiled and wood prepared for the furnace, stove or fireplace. Have a happy Thanksgiving.

# Statewide policy

(Continued from Page 1)  
"To our thinking, let's use this as an opportunity to improve what we're doing," Jay Nichols, executive director of the Vermont Principals' Association, said in an interview in mid-October. "We have plenty of racism and sexism and stuff like that happen every single day."

After a soccer game between Winooski High School and Enosburg Falls High School last month, Winooski school Superintendent Sean McManon released a statement saying that Winooski athletes "were called the N-word, monkey, and terrorist" by Enosburg Falls team members and fans. Other incidents across the state were also reported.

As a response, in mid-October the principals' association, which governs high school sports in the state, released a list of actions it was taking.

The organization has set up an online portal for spectators and students to report incidents at games. Officials are also working to create a "third-party investigation option," outside of the schools in question, to investigate allegations of abuse.

That position would likely be filled by a retired school official, such as a superintendent or principal, Nichols said. If there's an incident at a game, both schools would need to agree to allow an independent investigation, he said.

The Vermont Principals' Association and the Vermont Superintendents Association are

also asking local school officials to read a statement before "each school-sponsored event, effective immediately," according to the new procedures.

"Sportsmanship and a safe playing environment are the top priorities for all Vermont school-sponsored activities," the statement says. "Vermont law requires learning environments free from hazing, harassment, and bullying of any kind."

Violations could result in ejections from the game, forfeiture or suspension from future games, the statement says.

The association has also moved up the deadline for all high school sports officials to undergo implicit bias training.

High school sports officials had been required to complete the training before next fall. Now, they must be trained by the start of the upcoming winter sports season.

Franklin Northeast Superintendent Lynn Cota, whose district includes Enosburg Falls, welcomed the principals association's new procedures, calling them "an excellent place to start with this work" in a Wednesday email.

"It will be an intensive and ongoing process to raise awareness and make change so that all students feel a sense of belonging, dignity and justice," she said.

The recent allegations have highlighted the fact that, until now, no standard procedures have existed for reporting and investigating such abuse.

# Assistant Editor/Reporter

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The **REPORTER**

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