

# RNESU board OKs spending increase

**12-30-2021, Addison Independent, by Angelo Lynn**

BRANDON — The Rutland Northeast Supervisory Union board has OK'd a fiscal year 2022 budget with a 2.75% spending increase. But the board also has other pressing items on its plate, including a shortage of bus drivers, the continuing effect of the pandemic on the school district and a search for a new superintendent.

In its Dec. 15 discussion of the proposed district-wide budget for the 2022-23 school year, the board approved a proposed budget of \$10,733,367, which represents a spending increase of 2.75%. District wide property assessments were up 9.45%, however, which could likely mean the tax rates will remain somewhat stable. A budget surplus of \$170,000, which is typical, will be carried over.

At the same meeting, Superintendent Jeanne Collins briefed the board on the extensive efforts the administration is taking to ease the shortage of bus drivers throughout the district. She noted that as the district advertises for help in area newspapers, social media and digital venues, RNESU still faces shortages. She also said an important avenue could be word-of-mouth advertising and wanted the community to know that the district was offering to pay for training and licensing of drivers, and that there are opportunities to combine the two part-time daily activities of a typical driver (early morning driver to school and after school, with other part-time school positions (such as custodial) into a full-time job position that could offer benefits.

The administration will keep its focus on trying to recruit new bus drivers and encourages the school community to help spread word of the job opportunities.

## COVID BURNOUT

In comments related to the COVID-19 pandemic, Collins noted that the entire community needed a break from the constant strain, but that the current resurgence means that is unlikely.

"People are tired," she said.

Nevertheless, Collins encouraged everyone to remain vigilant through the next wave of the omicron variant and this winter's surge of the delta variant — both of which are expected to hit Vermont and the Northeast now and through the early part of the winter.

Collins noted that the entire second grade at Neshobe Elementary School had been quarantined. Then all of Neshobe went to remote learning just before the holiday break.

## WHITING CHILDCARE

Collins also described the Whiting Childcare Partnership Program to the board, noting that 20 students were enrolled as of Oct. 1. The program can host two classes of 16 students each in what she described as a "unique learning/daycare environment." Eleven students attend the program from outside the district, she said, adding that there was demand for a similar program in the southern part of the district.

In other news, RNESU Board Chair Rebecca Bertrand presented an update on the search for a replacement for Collins, who will leave at the end of the school year. Bertrand said the search was "well under way" and had hopes of completing the search before Town Meeting Day. She noted that the search committee consisted of six RNESU board members; a consultant; representatives from special services, finance and technology; a principal; a teacher; and Melinda Piper, secretary of the superintendent's office.

As a final action, the board approved an additional 50% increase in the board chair's compensation for the large number of hours the board chair puts into that position. That raises the pay to \$900 per year.