

Vermont schools see high turnover of superintendents this year

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BURLINGTON, Vt. (WCAX) - School administrators have been on the front lines the past two years helping to guide pandemic decision-making for their districts and communities on top of their traditional responsibilities.

Many superintendents and principals are moving on for many different reasons, causing an acute shortage around the region.

The Vermont Superintendents Association says there were 14 superintendent positions open recently, the highest the state has seen since the beginning of the Act 46 era.

"I've been a superintendent for 17 years in Vermont and it seemed like it was time to choose my personal life," said Rutland Northeast Supervisory Union Superintendent Jeanne Collins. The longtime Vermont educator says it's time to retire, a decision made partly because of evolving retirement legislation and her search for a better work-life balance. "While we've always had a 24/7 job, during COVID it really meant 24/7."

On the other side of the state, North Country Supervisory Union Superintendent John Castle is leaving his district for another opportunity. "After eight years, I think it's reasonable to have a fresh set of eyes come in and look at things a little differently. I think this is actually healthy for the institutions," Castle said.

And in the Orange East Supervisory Union, Superintendent Emilie Knisley is stepping down and Oxbow High School will be looking to fill two co-principal positions.

"We are experiencing turnover just like everyone. I think for us, it's more challenging because we are in a rural community. It's harder to engage people to come here and get them to stay," said Oxbow Unified Union School District School Board Chair Danielle Corti.

The VSA's Jeffrey Francis says there's a tight market for superintendent recruitment right now, with many applicants applying for multiple positions across the state. "I don't think that COVID and the conditions of the pandemic have made it any easier for anyone in public education," he said.

"People are feeling burnt out. People are feeling, I think, attacked. And the stress, I think, is quite high," Collins said.

The Vermont Principals Association' says there are at least 30 openings throughout the state. Last year's principal turnover rate was 18%. In Collins' district, there are three administrative roles open in addition to her job. "Rutland Northeast Supervisory Union has done one search process already and not yielded any results, so they'll be searching next steps and plan b and what does that look like," Collins said.

Castle says his district had three principal openings, one of which received four applications. "I think that means we as a state have to address this statewide and work with the AOE in recruitment and retention. I think we have to work on it regionally," he said.

The Vermont Superintendents Association says seven of the 14 transitioning superintendent positions have been filled.

