

# OVUHS grapples with staffing, safety issues

Remote classes punctuate end of year

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BRANDON — Wednesday, June 1 marked the first meeting of the OVUU school board following the horrific events in Uvalde, Texas. As with communities across the United States, fraught emotions and uncertainty prevailed, threatening to further disrupt an educational system already pushed to the limit by COVID-related adversity.

“Everybody is on edge right now,” said RNESU superintendent Jeanné Collins.

That edginess contributed to OVUHS’s recent announcement that the final week of school would be held by alternating remote and in-person school days due to low staffing issues.

That action, however, helped set off a wave of speculation as to the reasons for going back to learning remotely, which were compounded by rumors of a threat of violence at the school by one of its students.

“In every situation, whether it’s a threat against the school or a confrontation between students, all aspects are considered,” Collins said. “We pay attention to specific and non-specific threats and look at the language being used. In the event of a threat against the school, the police would be contacted, and a risk assessment threat protocol would trigger a team to determine the level of threat and appropriate next actions.”

Collins was unequivocal when it came to the events causing so much speculation.

“There has not been a threat against the school, but there was a recent confrontation between students,” she said. “That happens with teenagers. I think that’s where the confusion is coming from.”

Collins, who sent a letter last week to OVUHS parents in an attempt to dispel rumors and clarify the need for the reduction of in-person classes, expounded on her decision.

“Two years of COVID-affected learning and societal unrest has done a number on our students,” she said. “There’s been an increase in confrontational behavior issues across America, not just in our schools.”

“OVUHS is currently without approximately 25% of its staff due to various issues,” she continued. “The events in Texas did play a role in my decision to limit in-person classes. I didn’t feel we could safely staff the school. More kids with fewer staff doesn’t make sense right now. This is a proactive move. I don’t ever want to be wrong for failing to take a precaution.”

In addition to Collins’s customary superintendent’s report, she addressed the board about the school’s ongoing safety measures, highlighting several statewide initiatives, training, and procedural policies, which can be found online at the Vermont School Safety Center’s website <https://schoolsafety.vermont.gov/>.

## COVID-RELATED ABSENCES

She also addressed the ongoing staffing issues. “COVID-related absences are high among our faculty just as they are in the community,” she said. “We’ve had much higher than usual absences all year long. It’s tough finding subs, and we’ve been down an associate principal since February.”

“Teachers and administrators have been subbing for each other already,” she added. “That’s cut into their ability to lesson plan, and it makes an already difficult situation with behavioral issues that much harder.”

Collins, OV principal Jim Avery, OV assistant principal Geoff Lawrence, and OCA principal Thom Fleury will all be leaving the district for one reason or another effective June 30, 2022.

“That’s an unusually high amount of turnover for us, but we don’t anticipate that we will have the same level of staffing issues for next year,” Collins said.

Among the reasons for her optimism, Collins cited the district’s being ahead of schedule in its search for subs and the anticipation of fewer COVID-related difficulties.